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AFTER THE FLOOD: THE RECKONING

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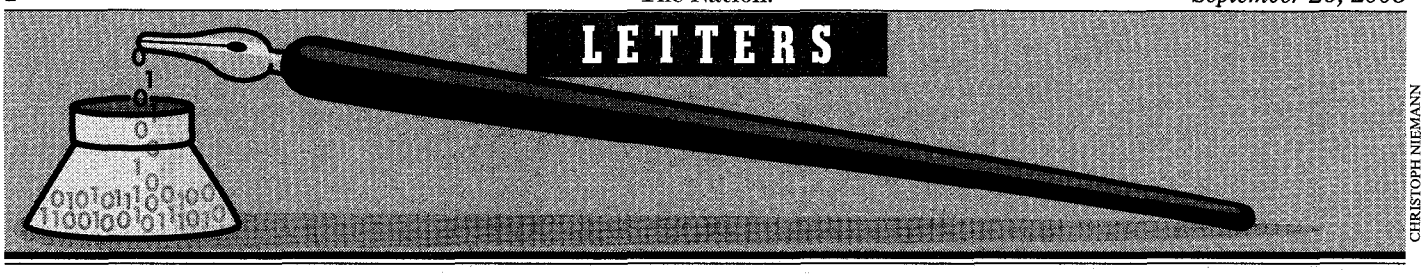

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

RECONNECTING TO REALITY

We received a huge amount of mail responding to Sherle R. Schwenninger's July 18/25 "Reconnecting to the World: A Foreign Policy for Democrats." Because of our biweekly summer schedule, we are only now finding the space to print a sampling of the letters. —The Editors

Salt Lake City

■ I applaud the clear insights about our world situation throughout your publication, but especially in Sherle R. Schwenninger's "Reconnecting to the World." This kind of reasoning shows that humanity really has potential.

BONNIE PHILLIPS

Doyline, La.

■ Sherle Schwenninger cogently presents ideas that have fermented in my own modest intellect for some time, although in my case it is more an inchoate uneasy sense that things are going terribly amiss, that historical mistakes of crucial importance are being repeated. I hope for all our sakes that a twenty-first-century version of FDR arises to reverse our lemminglike march back to the Harding–Coolidge era.

ROBERT K. SIMMS SR.

Brooklyn, NY

■ Schwenninger's essay reconnects the American mind to reality and thus lays the groundwork for constructive US engagement with the world. Exporting what has worked in the past for America, middle-class development, is a perspicacious remedy; one that needs to be reapplied at home as well. Of course, this vision must overcome a Republican Administration and its red state adherents, who do not like New Deals of any kind, let alone one for a developing world. Let's try anyway.

SIOAN BETHEL

Las Vegas

■ Sherle Schwenninger is on the right track. Getting our own house in order, rebuilding the middle class, limiting our foreign military adventures, stopping our preaching to other nations and finding our place as one prosperous country in the world should be the plan. Our success is largely due to our past setting of a good example as a world citizen, an image that has been tarnished a great deal in the past five years. But this isn't a project for governments alone. It requires a balanced approach: government doing things only it does well and private enterprise doing things it does well. Governments and private enterprise must come to realize that they are on the same team. Only by cooperating and constraining our greed can all benefit.

ELWOOD ANDERSON

Hastings-on-Hudson, NY

■ I was stopped short by Sherle Schwenninger's assertion that "traditionally, the overarching purpose of American foreign policy has been to shape a world order favorable to the American democratic way of life." By "traditionally," I understand him to refer to the cold war era, before the foreign policy dominance of the Democratic neoliberals and the Republican neoconservatives, the objects of his critique. But surely this "traditional" foreign policy included the wars in Korea and Vietnam, the sustained aggression against Nicaragua and Cuba, the bilateral support for South African apartheid, the creation and support of military dictatorships in Latin America, etc. Is Schwenninger asserting that war and intervention were intrinsically connected to sustaining our "democratic way of life"? We need to find a better model for the relationship between our foreign policy and our democracy at home.

FRANK BRODHEAD

Brandon, Fla.

■ As a working-class, nonintellectual guy, my view is that Sherle Schwenninger's ideal world will not occur anytime soon. The Bush gang cares only about world domination, and multiple power-sharing is not in their vocabulary. I think the idea of a "durable international system" is wonderful. The ideal of "a multipolar world" being the best way to "share the burden of international order-keeping" is just an ideal, however—certainly not grounded in the real world of American citizens' apathy and lack of interest in politics. And without the average Joe voting, it will not occur!

Of course, Bush's base is mobilized. But that's the problem in creating a new global policy without neoliberal or neoconservative (doesn't seem to be much difference) dominance. If the strongest base of voters continues to be the religious right, extremist unilateralism will reign for many years to come.

A progressive agenda in foreign affairs or domestic policy can be born only if the Democrats can decide how to mobilize their base like they never have before in the history of this Republic. Many of us middle/working-class folks know that nothing will ever be changed without the mobilization of the unheard masses. A campaign of education might be a good start. I hope Howard Dean is up for this daunting task.

BILL FALCONE

Fort Collins, Colo.

■ "Reconnecting to the World" disappoints, with its disregard of environmental health as the significant marker for the future security of the planet and its citizens. To paraphrase, "It's the environment, stupid." There is no dignity in starvation, and there is also no salvation in mindless consumption and production. You need to engage readers more often with the necessity of lowering consumption, not timeworn bromides about translating "productivity gains into rising wages and living standards" throughout the world.

On a planet where oil production has most likely peaked, where oceans are devastated, where forests are savaged, where air quality is often pitiful, where overcrowding and overpopulation replete with acute poverty and despair are the norm, the last thing we need is "a rapid rise of a global middle class." We need justice, democracy and sustainability. We need to love and eat and create and work. We do need to try and make a better life for every citizen. And we must do it by concentrating on the values that make us human rather than economic values that make a commodity of everything, including our dreams.

DAVID ROY

Bixby, Okla.

■ How can any theorist ignore the fact that we live on a planet with increasing population and dwindling resources? How can a policy wonk like Sherle Schwenninger propose that global security rests on "expanding middle-class prosperity"? The earth is already straining to sustain existing affluence, and when a billion Chinese and another billion Indians gobble up their piece of the middle-class pie, the only thing left will be crumbs. Paul Ehrlich pointed out forty years ago that 100 subsistence nomads do not consume as much of the earth's resources as one American. Am I delusional for thinking that the planet's social structures will implode under the pressures of more middle-class prosperity?

BILL CATHEY

Santa Monica, Calif.

■ It is inspiring to see a coherent vision of world order and prosperity. My only worry is that most Americans have become too enthralled with power and, since 9/11, with the base instinct toward retribution to even consider a policy acknowledging that the world has "outgrown American power," even if such a policy is likely to achieve security, prosperity and international respect. But it should be increasingly obvious, even to those originally taken in by Bush's obvious lies on the way to war in Iraq, that the only path to security for America is to create a system of world institutions that encourage average citizens throughout the world to pressure their governments to play by the rules. No one else will submit themselves to such restraint, however, if we do not lead the way. This leaves us with a historic

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EDITORIALS

The Disaster President

As the fourth anniversary of September 11 approached, Americans were increasingly disquieted by the costly quagmire in Iraq, rising gas prices and an economy that benefits only CEOs. Then the destruction visited upon the Gulf Coast by Hurricane Katrina, and the grossly negligent government response to the flooding that followed, exposed the full scope of George W. Bush's misrule. The failures were so outrageous they roused even our embedded media from its slumbers.

But the incompetence revealed by the response to the hurricane is deep-rooted, and can be traced to the twenty-five-year project, begun in the Reagan era, of discrediting government, "starving the beast" of resources and exalting private markets and faith-based charities. Tax cuts for the wealthy and Congressional corruption have drained government of the imagination and resources to address human needs. Katrina has brutally exposed Americans to the costs of this folly.

The spending squeeze that delayed the strengthening of the levees in New Orleans—despite repeated warnings from experts—reflects this Administration's skewed priorities: money for war and occupation in Iraq but not for protection of life at home. With one-third of the troops and half the equipment of the Louisiana and Mississippi National Guard in Iraq, Americans saw stark evidence of the domestic price of the war this President has chosen to fight on credit. And the chilling scenes of calamity visited on the most vulnerable exposed to the world America's reality: a country ever more divided by race and class.

The Gulf Coast looked, said Bush, like it had been hit with "the worst kind of weapon." The President is right, responded Representative Dennis Kucinich. "Indifference is a weapon of mass destruction." While most of the affluent of New Orleans left by car or plane, the poor had no way out. They were told to go to the Superdome and convention center, where—unbelievably—there were inadequate supplies of food and water, no electricity, befouled sanitation facilities and no police protection. When it came time to rescue and relocate the displaced, the Bush Administration placed the onus on state and local officials and called on citizens to give to charities. But faith-based disaster relief is no substitute for an effective, organized, rapid government response.

Since New Orleans is a major center of oil imports and refining, Katrina roiled already tight energy markets. Gas companies, wallowing in record profits, took the occasion to gouge Americans at the pump. The companies' rapacity and the country's vulnerability are direct results of Bush's Big Oil energy policy, his failure to lead a drive for energy independence by investing in conservation and in renewable and diverse energy sources. Instead of calling for an excess-profits tax on oil companies to help pay for the rebuilding, Bush immediately asserted that no tax increase was necessary.

The staggering incompetence of the Department of Homeland Security—which disregarded its own forecasts—exposed this Administration's glaring failure to prepare for emergencies after September 11. In the chaotic reorganization of DHS, the powers of FEMA, the agency in charge of natural disasters, were weakened and its budget slashed.

Now, in the wake of Katrina, America must begin rebuilding from the ruins caused by nature and policy. A massive public

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works project is imperative for New Orleans and neighboring communities, one with affordable housing and adequate planning for flood and storm protection. We must restore the wetlands and barrier islands that have been degraded by canals and levees.

The disaster requires a thorough investigation into what went wrong, by an independent commission with subpoena power. It should also lead now-furious Americans to re-examine a generation of backward priorities. The debate about the role of government in the service of public good has been reopened. The hurricane revealed not only the desperate poverty of the region's African-American population but also the poverty of our federal policies. For too long our leaders have abandoned our cities, our poor, our public infrastructure. We need a government dedicated to serving the unemployed, the ill fed and the ill housed. It's time to end the dismantling and begin the rebuilding.

There is nothing in George Bush's policies or actions to suggest that his Administration has the leadership or the values for the task. To recover from this government's follies, Americans need a relocation and reclamation project in Washington, DC, in addition to the massive one beginning in Katrina's wake.

* * *

For names of worthy hurricane aid organizations: www.thenation.com.

COMMENT

Confederacy of Dunces

In a week full of evidence that the federal government is woefully unprepared to respond to natural disasters, the plaintive testimony of Aaron Broussard, president of Jefferson Parish, just outside New Orleans, stood out. "We have been abandoned by our own country," he told NBC's *Meet the Press*. Broussard recounted how local officials had been told "every single day, 'The cavalry's coming, the cavalry's coming, the cavalry's coming.' The cavalry's still not here yet," he said. "I've begun to hear the hoofs, and we're almost a week out."

It was an eerie echo of the aftermath of 1992's Hurricane Andrew, which killed twenty-three people and exposed deep weaknesses in federal emergency programs. "Where the hell is the cavalry?" the emergency manager of Dade County, Florida, famously pleaded several days after Andrew blew through.

After Andrew the cavalry got its act together. Reforms engineered by President Clinton's Federal Emergency Management Agency director, James Lee Witt, won FEMA bipartisan praise throughout the 1990s. But by the time Hurricane Katrina roared into the Gulf, FEMA—the government entity that could have done the most to alleviate the crisis in the storm's wake—had been seriously hobbled by the Bush Administration. In 2002 FEMA was swallowed by the Department of Homeland Security—a move that the agency's current director, Michael Brown, promised would give the country a new, improved "FEMA on steroids." Instead, much of the agency's natural disaster work was sidelined in favor of antiterrorism programs.

"I am extremely concerned that the ability of our nation to

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COMMENT

prepare for and respond to disasters has been sharply eroded," Witt told Congress on March 24, 2004. The former director has urged that the agency be withdrawn from DHS—a proposal that's gaining traction in Congress following the Katrina meltdown.

While the Administration's push to privatize key services was draining the agency of some of its most experienced personnel, Bush appointed two FEMA directors with no substantive experience in disaster management. The first, Joe Allbaugh, was Bush's chief of staff in Texas. Allbaugh's handpicked successor, Brown, was an official with the International Arabian Horse Association before coming to FEMA. "Our professional staff are being systematically replaced by politically connected novices and contractors," Pleasant Mann—a seventeen-year FEMA veteran who was then head of the agency's government employees' union—complained to Congress last year. "A lot of the institutional knowledge is gone," Mann commented later. So is morale: In a February 2004 survey of FEMA personnel, 80 percent said FEMA had become "a poorer agency" under DHS.

That's not the worst of it. From its first months in office, the Bush Administration has chipped away at disaster mitigation programs designed to curb precisely the kind of damage now overwhelming Louisiana and neighboring states. Project Impact, a modest but influential mitigation program created by Witt in 1997, had spread to some 250 communities and all fifty states before it got the Bush budget ax in 2001. In Pascagoula, Mississippi, Project Impact was creating a database of structures in the local flood plain—crucial information that could have stemmed some of the havoc that city faces today. Such programs would have brought down the cost of repairing cities like Pascagoula: According to FEMA's own estimates, every dollar spent on mitigation saves roughly two dollars in disaster recovery costs.

No matter: In 2003 Congress approved a White House proposal to slash in half FEMA's Hazard Mitigation Grant Program—credited with saving an estimated $8.8 million in recovery costs in 1999 in three eastern North Carolina communities alone after Hurricane Floyd. The same year, the Bush Administration instituted a new program of mitigation grants awarded on a competitive basis. Again the experts warned against this approach, saying that less affluent and smaller communities would lose out on desperately needed funds.

One of the communities that lost out was Jefferson Parish. Last year FEMA turned down all three of its requests for flood-mitigation grants. At the time, Broussard's parish was home to more than 5,700 "repetitive loss structures"—buildings that had seen repeated flood damage and needed to be moved or elevated.

That missed opportunity in Jefferson Parish is one of many in the region that FEMA must now reckon with. It's all too easy to play Monday-morning quarterback amid the vast suffering along the Gulf Coast, but it's become all the more difficult to ignore the evidence that FEMA's ability to keep our country safe in the face of natural calamities, undermined by our Commander in Chief, is itself becoming a disaster. JON ELLISTON

Jon Elliston, news editor for the Asheville, North Carolina, Mountain Xpress, *is the author of* Disaster in the Making, *an investigative report on FEMA funded by the Association of Alternative Newsweeklies.*

Looting the Black Poor

Five days before Hurricane Katrina struck, 100 people gathered at a local Catholic Church in eastern New Orleans. They were there to talk about the city's astronomically high poverty rate. This was not a dry gathering of academics, local and state officials, and business leaders. They were community residents, welfare recipients, ex-offenders and antipoverty activists. Most were black. Many did not have cars and had to take buses to get to the meeting. That wasn't unusual. Nearly one out of three city residents doesn't have a car. The participants felt they were in a race against time to combat the crisis—the poverty rate in New Orleans is more than double the national average. The city's poor had grown more numerous and more desperate than ever.

Whenever I have visited friends who live in neighborhoods away from the glitter of the French Quarter and other tourist spots, I've been struck by the dire poverty, the legions of homeless, the large number of abandoned and run-down buildings, the pockmarked streets and sidewalks. New Orleans is the classic tale of two cities: one showy, middle-class and white; the other poor, downtrodden and low-income black. It was a city that didn't wait for a disaster to happen; grinding poverty and neglect had already wreaked that disaster on thousands.

What happened after Katrina added to the misery was predictable. Bush's bumbling and the bungling of FEMA turned relief efforts into a nightmare. That virtually guaranteed that some blacks out of criminal greed and others out of sheer desperation and panic would take to the streets in an orgy of looting and mayhem. It was equally predictable how some state and federal officials, and some in the media, would respond. They instantly branded the looters animals and thugs. Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco said soldiers should shoot to kill to restore order.

The same day Katrina struck, something else happened that also tells much about the Bush Administration's callous disregard for the poor. The Census Bureau released a report that found the number of poor Americans has jumped even higher since Bush took office in 2000, with blacks at the bottom of the economic totem pole. Bush's war and economic policies have added to their woes. His tax cuts redistributed billions to the rich and corporations. The Iraq War has drained billions from cash-starved job training, health and education programs. Increased dependence on foreign oil has driven gas and oil prices skyward. Corporate downsizing, outsourcing and industrial flight have further fueled America's poverty crisis, which has slammed young blacks, like those who ransacked stores in New Orleans, the hardest of all. Their unemployment rate is double and in some parts of the country triple that of white males.

During Bush's years, state and federal cutbacks in job training and skills programs, the brutal competition for low- and semi-skilled service and retail jobs from immigrants, and the refusal of many employers to hire those with criminal records have further hammered black communities and added to the depression-level unemployment figures among young blacks. The tale of poverty is more evident in the nearly 1 million blacks behind bars, the HIV/AIDS rampage in black communities,

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COMMENT

the sea of black homeless people and the raging drug and gang violence that rips apart many black communities.

The looting and poverty in New Orleans put an ugly public face on a crisis that Bush Administration policies have made worse. The millions in America who grow poorer and more desperate are bitter testament to those failures. The pity is that it took Bush's criminal incompetence and Mother Nature for the world to see that. EARL OFARI HUTCHINSON

Earl Ofari Hutchinson, a political analyst and social issues commentator, is the author of The Crisis in Black and Black *(Middle Passage).*

The Big Easy Dies Hard

New Orleans

The empty streets of this city present a vista of apocalyptic desolation: wind-ripped roofs, downed trees, smashed fast-food signs, dangling power lines, columns of dark smoke and everywhere heaps of garbage. On a lawn near the Ninth Ward three light brown mules, wandering the city alone, graze peacefully. In the sky above, helicopters drum the air. From the pale, empty stretches of elevated Interstate 10 one can look down on wide expanses of the city where homes are submerged in the flat, brackish floodwater. Strangely, the wind now is gritty and dry.

At first the city appears like a giant conceptual art installation, or the set of some archetypal cold-war disaster movie. But then comes evidence of what this really means: dazed refugees wade through the filthy water or push shopping carts down ravaged streets or wait silently in lines for evacuation. And every now and then there is the stench of abandoned corpses. Officials have no idea how many people are lost, trapped in the attics soon to be dead, or drowned and hidden in their homes.

Few can fathom the near-total lack of planning and coordination among local, state and federal authorities. "I been hearing about this is gonna happen for my whole life—how could they not have a plan?" says a man named Reginald Bell as he drops off extra candles to a neighbor.

On a side street in Algiers, on the flood-spared west bank, the corpse of a young black man in blue pants and white shirt lies rotting in the sun about ten feet from a chained-up health clinic. Swollen, greasy and oozing maggots, the dead man has become a symbol of official neglect. There are scores of uncollected corpses like this all over New Orleans.

"See, they just leave him here," says Malik Rahim, a community organizer who is spearheading a grassroots relief effort called the Green Cross. "He's been here almost five days, man." A colleague and I look down at the corpse dumbly. A police car rolls by. Another one stops, but the two white cops in it are dismissive. "We don't have the resources," says one.

"Their message to black people here is, Get out or die. You on your own," says Rahim, as the cops pull away.

The next day at the infamous convention center, where stunned refugees are being searched and then loaded onto outbound helicopters, a dozen ambulances sit waiting for orders. No rescues yet today, I am told. As for corpses, no one knows what the plan is.

Archie Haley, an emergency medical technician from Oak Grove, near the Arkansas border, squats as I scarf down a military MRE food ration; he explains that the major problem is "the large population of welfare-ized blacks who can't help themselves." My interlocutor is white like me, so he feels comfortable. "See, these people are the city's disease." His is an attitude that is far too common among officials here. Racism and incompetence seemed to merge to create a sluggish response. Despite all the troops, SWAT teams and out-of-town cops that have arrived since September 5, there's still little sign of a plan: On the ground, chaos reigns. Civilian volunteers are still doing many of the rescues; no one knows where to get water or MREs; the radio reports nothing of use.

By the Wednesday after Katrina hit, people here began to grow desperate as their stockpiles of supplies ran out. Survival looting, facilitated by the police, gave way to opportunistic rampaging and panic. "We grew more and more frightened each day because there was never any word from the government about emergency foods and water distribution, and we listened to the radio pretty regularly," says Mike Howell, a former academic, local peace activist and *Nation* reader I happened upon in a dark but open bar in the Bywater district. There is no power or water in this joint but somehow there is cold beer and free BBQ.

"All they kept saying was, Go to the Superdome, but we knew conditions over there were horrible, and we heard they weren't letting people back out who wanted to leave," says Howell.

Several SRO hotels, he says, have organized themselves into "communes" and do their survival looting in an organized and collectivist fashion. Everywhere one hears stories of mutual aid.

One of the most striking things about being in New Orleans is the number of people who outright refuse to leave. Howell calls them "the diehards." The mayor has ordered a mandatory evacuation, but the diehards, as well as tens of thousands who live in dry, relatively unscathed areas, are poised to defy the order.

Out east on elevated I-10, above the dark, oily floodwaters of Elysian Fields, a man and his son are camped in a looted mail van. Two empty bottles of champagne sit on the dash; BLACK POWER is spray-painted on the side. "We're bringing food and water back down in to the dogs. I got two of 'em still

(Continued on Page 30)

CALVIN TRILLIN

TOUGH HOMBRE PRESIDENT REMAINS INERT AS CITY GOES UNDER; HIS *PET GOAT* READING ON 9/11 RECALLED

No flip-flops! He's consistent as you please:
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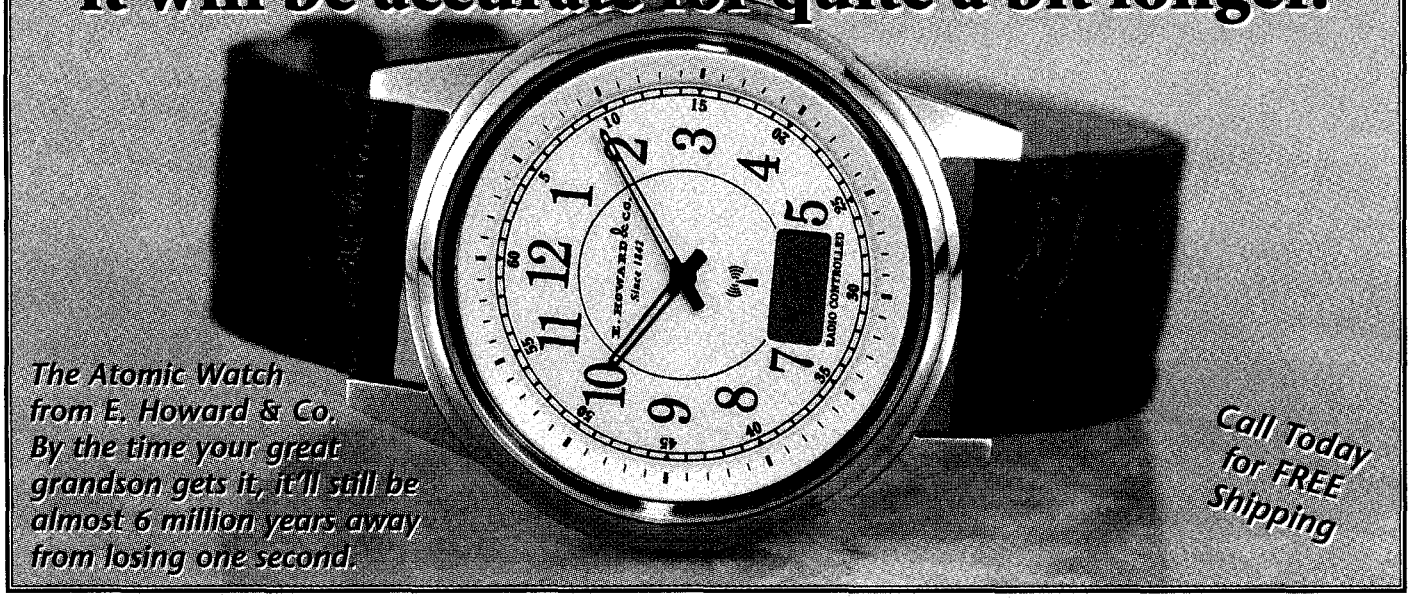

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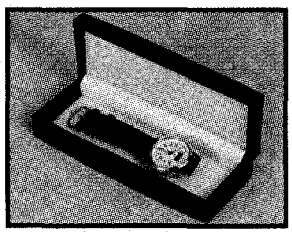

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COMIX NATION

Steve Brodner is a caricaturist. A collection of his works, Freedom Fries, *was published in 2004.*

Steve Brodner

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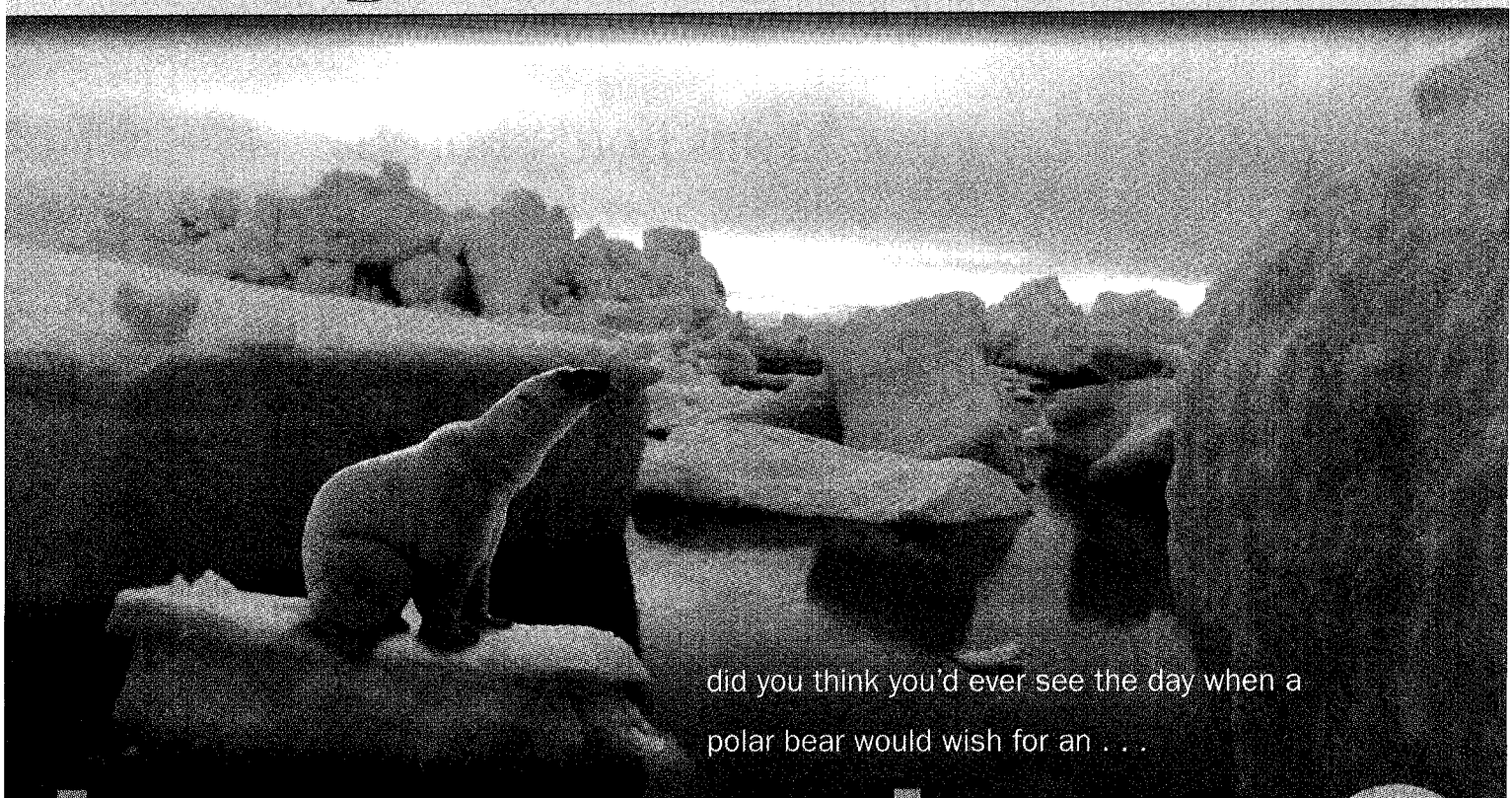

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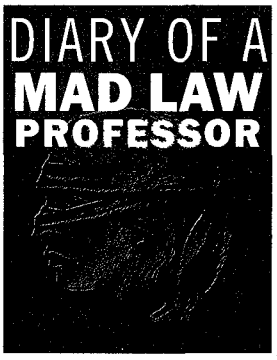
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

The View From Lott's Porch



When I think about the human disaster in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, there are two moments that stand out in my mind. The first is George W. Bush's press conference in Mississippi on September 2, during which he bounced uneasily from foot to foot like he couldn't wait to get out of there, looking sullen and furrowed, observing with tense jocularity that Trent Lott's house had been lost, too, and that "we" were going to rebuild him "a fantastic house" and that he, our President, was looking forward to rocking on the porch when that day came to pass. The second moment was the now-famous interview with Homeland Security chief Michael Chertoff on National Public Radio. Media junkie that I am, I had the TV and the radio on at the same time. As pictures of the horrific conditions at the convention center, including the image of that poor old woman who had passed away in her wheelchair, were being broadcast to the world, Chertoff was insisting that he had no knowledge of any extreme conditions or deaths at the center. "Our reporter has seen [it]," insisted the host. "I can't argue with you about what your reporter tells you," said Chertoff.

I confess that I find myself filtering this horror through a very personal lens. It overlaps with the task of clearing out and selling the house I grew up in, the house my mother was born in, my grandmother's house, a house that has belonged to my family for a hundred years. My distress at having to give it up is confused with the scenes of Katrina's devastation that most of us—if not Chertoff—are witnessing. Against that appalling backdrop I find myself clinging to a sense of place, even though I am not truly or traumatically displaced. Mine was an African-American family that owned a home in times when so few did. As one of the neighbors put it tartly when discovering we were selling: "I'm African. We don't sell our land."

So I think about this as I look at the devastation of the Ninth Ward, for just one example, an area that has perhaps more African-American property owners than anyplace else in Louisiana. As I drove back and forth from the house I grew up in, carrying out pictures of my college graduation and my Latin notes from seventh grade, I heard a black woman on the radio describe how jarring it was to see the media describe her neighborhood as one riven by poverty and desperation. She was about to get her MBA, her brother already had his MBA, their extended family owned nine homes there, had insurance and owned cars in which they had fled for their lives. But it was the Ninth Ward; it was indeed being dubbed "poverty-stricken," "corrupt," "drug-ridden"; and politicians like Dennis Hastert were talking about bulldozing the entire area.

Race and class vied fiercely against each other—it's just poverty, poverty, poverty, according to the many commentators who were busy denying that the devastation had any link to race. I guess we don't like to talk about the way realtors take note of race—of how blacks "lower the property values" of the houses they move into, no matter how well kept. By the same token, when race was discussed, the black neighborhoods were almost romanticized as rickety, picturesque shantytowns destined for doom. The degree to which many of the black neighborhoods were also home to Louisiana's deep-rooted black working, middle and professional classes seemed lost entirely.

I began to wonder what might happen if I were not engaged in the relatively leisurely process of packing up my memories but was forced to run for my life. If it were not tragic enough to lose everything to the hurricane, it must have been many times more traumatizing to endure the chaotic evacuation that followed. It is hard to tell what's fact or fear in the witness accounts just yet, but the many descriptions of people being "sorted" in the shelters should give us pause. The elderly were taken from their families, the sick from their caretakers, newborns from their mothers and, because men were apparently segregated from women, husbands from wives, mothers from sons. I heard one unidentified authority saying that when people were evacuated to other states, they were not told where they were going so as to make them less unruly. But there were also accounts of white foreign nationals airlifted out "secretly" by National Guardsmen and warned not to go into the shelters because it was too dangerous for them.

On NPR a sociologist named Betty Hearn Morrow opined that it was less traumatic for people in distress to be grouped by their own kind. "That's just human nature," said Morrow. Putting people into groups reinforces a sense of familiarity and security, so they should be relocated "according to their backgrounds." She gave an example of sorting people from Guatemala and Nicaragua and explained how that would help keep the peace.

My ears pricked up at this take on civil society; I wondered what "kind" I might appear to be in an evacuation. At 13, my son is almost six feet. If we were fleeing without any identification, would anyone believe he's a child? Would he be sorted with adults? Would he be separated from me? Would we be put on separate buses to unknown compass points? Would it really becalm me with a sense of "familiarity" to be penned up and marched off with a group of other black women of my "background"?

According to Mayor Bloomberg, the City of New York has been divided into grids in case of catastrophe. People would be ordered from their homes, or taken by force if necessary, and marshaled along preset routes to reception centers, where they would be identified by Social Security number and then relocated. I want to be a good citizen, part of the orderliness of a well-managed response to disaster. But with the images of New Orleans in mind, why on earth would any of us stream willingly toward chaos? It seems to me that one of the most pressing issues for the future is clarifying the precise protocols for evacuation. If it is true that families are to be broken up as a means of crowd control, then perhaps just a little public discussion is in order, no? And if it is true that white foreign nationals are a higher priority than black solid citizens, to what then do we pledge allegiance? ■

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ERIC ALTERMAN

Found in the Flood

The New Orleans flood produced a dizzying array of images both striking and shocking, but what was perhaps most unusual about them was the return to American television screens and newspaper front pages of poor people in a manner that was neither condescending nor condemnatory. A tone was set by the likes of Jason DeParle in the *New York Times*, who began his story like this: "The white people got out. Most of them, anyway.... it was mostly black people who were left behind. Poor black people, growing more hungry, sick and frightened by the hour as faraway officials counseled patience and warned that rescues take time." Wil Haygood in the *Washington Post* struck a similar tone (albeit buried on page A33): "To those who wonder why so many stayed behind when push came to water's mighty shove here, those who were trapped have a simple explanation: Their nickels and dimes and dollar bills simply didn't add up to stage a quick evacuation mission."

Beyond the confines of its much beloved tourist districts, New Orleans was a far poorer, blacker and more dangerous city than most Americans imagined. According to figures posted on *The Progress Report*, the Lower Ninth Ward, where the flooding was worst, is more than 98 percent black, with average annual household income below $27,500, not even half the national average, with a quarter of those earning less than $10,000. As Brian Wolshon, a consultant on the state's evacuation plan, told the *Times*, the city's evacuation plan paid little attention to its "low-mobility" population—the old, the sick and the poor with no cars or other way to get out of town.

It's impossible to tell why it was that so many TV news professionals, even the infamous media whores of cable news, caught the fever, unapologetically pointing to race and class as fundamental dimensions of the unfolding catastrophe. Perhaps they had no choice but to notice; perhaps their professional shame had grown unbearable during the years—even the post-9/11 years—of covering to death every missing little blue-eyed, blond white girl; perhaps, caught inside the tragedy, their human spirits collided with their professional selves. No matter the reason, it was a sight to behold.

In an interview with House majority leader Tom DeLay, African-American MSNBC anchor Lester Holt asked, "People are now beginning to voice what we've all been seeing with our own eyes—the majority of people left in New Orleans are black, they are poor, they are the underbelly of society. When you look at this, what does this say about where we are as a country and where our government is in terms of how it views the people of this country?" When DeLay responded with the usual right-wing nonsense—"We're doing a wonderful job, and we are an incredibly compassionate people"—Holt refused to back off. "Those people at the Superdome, those people at the convention center. They're largely black, and they're largely poor, and they're largely left behind. What does that say about our country right now and how it treats its citizens?" MSNBC also showed Condoleezza Rice looking no less out-to-lunch addressing the cameras than she had the day before, shopping for shoes. "You've spoken very eloquently around the world about growing up as an African-American in the South," she was pointedly asked. "Are you concerned now that at least the impression is going to exist in this country and abroad that some of the relief has been affected by the race and class of the people most affected?" The Secretary of State shamed her heritage as well as her PhD with the idiotic response, "That Americans would somehow in a color-affected way decide who to help and who not to help, I just don't believe it."

While MSNBC played far above its usual batting average, it was CNN whose aggressive and impassioned reporting provided the biggest surprise and offered perhaps the finest coverage in the network's history. Chris Lawrence described "babies 3, 4, 5 months old, living in these horrible conditions.... These people are being forced to live like animals." Paula Zahn grilled the hapless Bush crony Michael Brown, who pretends to direct FEMA. "And finally tonight, sir," she demanded, "you said earlier today that part of the blame for the—what you think will be an—enormous death toll in New Orleans rests with the people who did not evacuate the city, who didn't heed the warnings. Is that fair, to blame the victims, many of whom tell us they had no way out, they had no cars of their own, and that public assistance wasn't provided to get them out of the city?" Jack Cafferty's commentaries were also impressive: smart, gutsy and focused on the issues of race, class, poverty, federal incompetence and the cost to the victims of having 40 percent of the National Guard away at war.

Yet in the media's Bush propaganda wing, Fox was still Fox. Bill O'Reilly, deaf and blind to the obvious class implications of the pre-flood exodus, speculated, "A lot of the people who stayed wanted to do this destruction" and wondered why "looters" were not being shot on sight. Indeed, aside from the surprisingly passionate Shephard Smith, much of Fox's reporting could have been datelined "Neverland." Neil Cavuto brought in Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, to advise those who'd lost everything to "play it down and pray it up." Fred Barnes complained that those in need had purposely bilked the taxpayers with their cavalier choice of domiciles. "They know they're going to flood. And when these things happen, they want the taxpayers all over the country to pay, and they do." Charles Krauthammer joshed back, "It's a bit unseemly to talk about cutting off aid to these people while the hurricane is still roaring through Mississippi. But let's give it a try," proceeding to needle Barnes about his own summer house. Together with Brit Hume, the Fox pundits laughed about the rain damage to the cover of the Barnes family swimming pool.

Yes, it was a regular laugh-riot over at Fox. But for once, the rest of the media did not follow them into the sewer and instead gave their faux-news phonies a chance to see how real journalists do the job. ■

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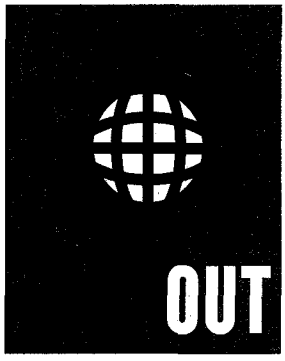
NAOMI KLEIN

Needed: A People's Reconstruction

On September 4, six days after Katrina hit, I saw the first glimmer of hope. "The people of New Orleans will not go quietly into the night, scattering across this country to become homeless in countless other cities while federal relief funds are funneled into rebuilding casinos, hotels, chemical plants.... We will not stand idly by while this disaster is used as an opportunity to replace our homes with newly built mansions and condos in a gentrified New Orleans." The statement came from Community Labor United, a coalition of low-income groups in New Orleans. It went on to demand that a committee made up of evacuees "oversee FEMA, the Red Cross and other organizations collecting resources on behalf of our people.... We are calling for evacuees from our community to actively participate in the rebuilding of New Orleans." It's a radical concept: The $10.5 billion released by Congress and the $500 million raised by private charities doesn't belong to the relief agencies or the government; it belongs to the victims. The agencies entrusted with the money should be accountable to them. Put another way, the people Barbara Bush tactfully described as "underprivileged anyway" just got very rich.



Except relief and reconstruction never seem to work like that. When I was in Sri Lanka six months after the tsunami, many survivors told me that the reconstruction was victimizing them all over again. A council of the country's most prominent businesspeople had been put in charge of the process, and they were handing the coast over to developers at a frantic pace. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of poor fishing people were still stuck in sweltering inland camps, patrolled by soldiers with machine guns and entirely dependent on relief agencies. They called reconstruction "the second tsunami."

There are already signs that New Orleans evacuees could face a similarly brutal second storm. Jimmy Reiss, chairman of the New Orleans Business Council, told *Newsweek* that he has been brainstorming about how "to use this catastrophe as a once-in-an-eon opportunity to change the dynamic." The Business Council's wish list is well-known: low wages, low taxes, more luxury condos and hotels. Before the flood these schemes were already displacing poor African-Americans: While their music and culture was for sale in an increasingly corporatized French Quarter (where only 4.3 percent of residents are black), their housing developments were being torn down. "For white tourists and businesspeople, New Orleans' reputation is 'a great place to have a vacation but don't leave the French Quarter or you'll get shot,'" Jordan Flaherty, a New Orleans–based labor organizer told me the day after he left the city by boat. "Now the developers have their big chance to disperse the obstacle to gentrification—poor people."

Here's a better idea: New Orleans could be reconstructed by and for the very people most victimized by the flood. Schools and hospitals that were falling apart before could finally have adequate resources; the reconstruction could create thousands of jobs and provide massive skills training. And the effort could be led by groups like Douglass Community Coalition. Before the hurricane this remarkable assembly of parents, teachers, students and artists was trying to reconstruct the city from the ravages of poverty by transforming Frederick Douglass Senior High School into a model of community learning. They have already done the painstaking work of building consensus around education reform. Now that the funds are flowing, shouldn't they have the tools to rebuild every ailing public school in the city?

For a people's reconstruction process to become a reality (and to keep more contracts from going to Halliburton), the evacuees have to be central in all decision-making. According to Curtis Muhammad of Community Labor United, the disaster's starkest lesson is that African-Americans cannot count on any level of government to protect them. "We had no caretakers," he says. That means the community groups that do represent African-Americans in Louisiana and Mississippi—many of which lost staff and resources in the flood—need our support now. Only a massive injection of cash and volunteers will enable them to do the crucial work of organizing evacuees—currently scattered through forty-one states—into a powerful political constituency. The most pressing question is where evacuees will live. A dangerous consensus is building that they should collect a little charity and keep moving north. Muhammad and CLU, however, are calling for the right to return: If evacuees are going to have houses and schools to come back to, many will need to return to their home states and fight for them.

These ideas are not without precedent. When Mexico City was struck by a devastating earthquake in 1985, the state also failed the people: Public housing crumbled and the army was ready to bulldoze structures with survivors still in them. A month after the quake 40,000 refugees marched on the government, refusing to be relocated out of their neighborhoods and demanding a "Democratic Reconstruction." Not only were 50,000 new dwellings for the homeless built in a year; the neighborhood groups that grew out of the rubble launched a movement that is challenging Mexico's traditional power holders to this day.

And the people I met in Sri Lanka were tired of waiting for the promised relief. Some survivors are now calling for a People's Planning Commission for Post-Tsunami Recovery. They say the relief agencies should answer to them; it's their money, after all.

The idea could take hold in the United States, and it must. Because there is only one thing that can compensate the victims of this most human of natural disasters, and that is what has been denied them throughout: power. It will be a difficult battle, but the evacuees should draw strength from the knowledge that they are no longer poor people; they are rich people who have been temporarily locked out of their bank accounts.

Please earmark your check for the People's Hurricane Relief Fund, and make it out to the Vanguard Public Foundation, 383 Rhode Island St., Suite 301, San Francisco, CA 94103. ■

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ARTICLES

THE FEAR OF THE LIBERALS

by COREY ROBIN

It's the fourth anniversary of September 11, and Americans are getting restless about the war in Iraq. Republicans are challenging the President, activists and bloggers are pressing the Democrats and liberal hawks are reconsidering their support for the war. Everyone, it seems, is asking questions.

Two questions, however, have not been asked, perhaps because they might actually help us move beyond where we are and where we've been. First, how is it that few liberals and no leftists in 1968 believed that Lyndon Johnson, arguably the most progressive President in American history, would or could airlift democracy to Vietnam, while many liberals and not a few leftists in 2003 believed that the most reactionary President since William McKinley could and would export democracy to Iraq?

Second, why did certain liberals who opposed the war in Iraq refuse to march against it? The reason they gave was that left-wing groups like ANSWER, which helped organize the antiwar rallies, failed to denounce Saddam's regime. Yet many of those who could not abide an alliance with ANSWER endorsed the war in Afghanistan—even though it was waged by a government that recently invaded three Caribbean countries, funded dirty wars in Latin America and backed the government of Guatemala, the only regime in the Western Hemisphere condemned by a UN-sponsored truth commission for committing acts of genocide. Politics, of course, often entails an unhappy choice of associations. But if the deeds of the US government need not stop liberals from supporting the war in Afghanistan, why should the words—words, mind you, not deeds—of leftists deprive the antiwar movement of these very same liberals' support?

Both questions register a fundamental shift among liberals, and on the left, since the 1960s: from skepticism of to faith in US power, and from faith in to skepticism of popular movements. During the Vietnam era, liberals and leftists believed not only in social justice but also in mass protest. Whether the cause was democracy at home or liberation abroad, men and women afflicted by oppression had to organize themselves for freedom. Yes, some of yesterday's activists were blind to coercion within these movements, and others joined elite cadres bombing their way to liberation. Still, the animating faith of the 1960s was in the democratic capacities of ordinary men and women, making it difficult for liberals and leftists to believe in conquering armies from abroad or shock troops from on high.

Many liberals, and some leftists, no longer hold these views. Their faith is guided not by the light of justice but by the darkness of evil: by the tyranny of dictators, the genocide of ethnic cleansers and the terrorism of Islamist radicals. Despite their differences—some of these liberals and leftists support the war in Iraq, others do not; some are partial to popular movements, particularly those opposing anti-American governments, while others favor constitutional regimes, particularly those supporting the United States—theirs is a liberalism, as the late Harvard scholar Judith Shklar put it in a pioneering essay in 1989, that seeks to ward off the "*summum malum*" (worst evil) rather than to install a "*summum bonum*" (highest good). Reversing Augustine's dictum that there is no such thing as evil—evil being only the absence of good—today's liberal believes there is only evil and progress is measured by the distance we put between ourselves and that evil.

Hostility to popular protest and indulgence of American power follow naturally from this position. Mass movements, liberals claim, are blind to evil or apologize for it. Sometimes they actively court it. In their reckless pursuit of utopia, they march men and women to the gulag or into shooting galleries of terrorism and civil war. Only a politics of restraint can shield us from the temptations of violence. While such a philosophy would seem to militate against George W. Bush's empire, many liberals have concluded that evil in the world is so titanic that only US power can deliver us from it.

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Straddling minimalism at home and maximalism abroad, many of today's liberals are inspired by fear. This "liberalism of fear," as Shklar called it, is not to be confused with the terror Americans felt after 9/11 or with Democratic timidity in the face of Republican success. No, today's liberal believes in fear as an idea—that it inflicts such suffering on men and women that we can assess governments by the degree to which they minimize it. Fear is the gold standard, the universal measure, of liberal morality: Whatever rouses fear is bad, whatever diminishes it is less bad. In the words of Michael Ignatieff, liberalism "rests less on hope than on fear, less on optimism about the human capacity for good than on dread of the human capacity for evil, less on a vision of man as maker of his history than of man the wolf toward his own kind."

Though leftists in the sixties certainly spoke of fear, they viewed it not as a foundation but as an obstacle, a hindrance in the struggle for freedom and equality. Whites resisted civil rights, James Baldwin observed, because they were possessed by a "sleeping terror" of ceding status and privilege to blacks. Blacks, in turn, were like "the Jews in Egypt, who really wished to get to the Promised Land but were afraid of the rigors of the journey." The goal was to eliminate or overcome fear, to take one step closer to the Promised Land. This required not only courage but also an ideologically grounded hope for progress. Without an answering vision of social justice, no one would make the journey.

Many contemporary liberals have given up that hope, turning what a previous generation saw as an impediment into a path. Fear is no longer an obstacle but a crutch, a negative truth from which liberalism derives its confidence and strength. "What liberalism requires," according to Shklar, "is the possibility of making the evil of cruelty and fear the basic norm of its political practices and prescriptions." Liberal values like the rule of law and democracy obtain their worth not from reason or rights—which many liberals no longer believe in as foundational principles—but from the cruelty and fear illiberal states and movements routinely inflict upon helpless men and women.

Today's liberals are attracted to fear for many reasons, including revulsion at the crimes of the last century and the miserable state of the postcolonial world. But one of the main reasons is their belief that fear possesses an easy intelligibility. Fear requires no deep philosophy, no leap of reason, to establish its evil: Everyone knows what it is and that it is bad. "Because the fear of systematic cruelty is so universal," Shklar wrote, "moral claims based on its prohibition have an immediate appeal and can gain recognition without much argument." Once liberals realize that they are "more afraid of being cruel"—and of others being cruel—"than of anything else," Richard Rorty has argued, they need not worry about the grounds of their beliefs.

How did a philosophy so averse to utopia and violence get hitched to the American empire? I don't just mean here the war in Iraq, about which liberals disagreed, but the larger project of using the American military to spread democracy and human rights. How did liberals, who've spent the better part of three decades attacking left-wing adventurism, wind up supporting the greatest adventure of our time?

The answer is that liberals need fear: to justify their principles, to warn us of what happens when liberalism is abandoned. And so they are driven abroad to confront the tyrannies that make life miserable elsewhere, in order to derive confidence in their own, admittedly imperfect but infinitely better, regimes. A souped-up version of Churchill's adage that democracy is the worst possible government except for all the others, the liberalism of fear sends writers and fighters to foreign lands in search of themselves and their beleaguered faith. In the words of Ignatieff:

> When policy [in the Balkans] was driven by moral motives, it was often driven by narcissism. We intervened not only to save others, but to save ourselves, or rather an image of ourselves as defenders of universal decencies. We wanted to show that the West "meant" something. This imaginary West, this narcissistic image of ourselves, we believed was incarnated in the myth of a multiethnic, multiconfessional Bosnia.

The moral exhilaration of which Ignatieff speaks is closely linked to the revival of an activism discredited since the sixties—an activism, ironically, liberals helped to defeat but now miss and mourn. The military incursions in Bosnia, Ignatieff notes, were "a theater of displacement, in which political energies that might otherwise have been expended in defending multiethnic society at home were directed instead at defending mythic multiculturalism far away. Bosnia became the latest *bel espoir* of a generation that had tried ecology, socialism, and civil rights only to watch all these lose their romantic momentum."

Bosnia was certainly not the first time that liberals looked to a benighted regime abroad in order to compensate for the stalled pace of domestic advance. In 1792 France's Girondins sensed that their revolution was in peril. Beholding long-suffering peoples to the east, they decided to export progress and promptly declared war on... Austria. And it was Robespierre, so often denounced as a utopian scourge, who issued this prescient warning to his distracted comrades: "No one loves armed missionaries."

Nor was Bosnia the last time. Since 9/11 liberal hawks—and their fellow fliers on the left—have turned the rest of the world into a theater of social experiment and political reform, endorsing foreign expeditions in the name of an enlightenment they can no longer pursue at home. They have opted for a detoured radicalism, which, like all detours, paves a convenient path to an obstructed destination: yesterday Afghanistan, today Iraq, tomorrow ourselves. Though the peregrinations of Christopher Hitchens are by now familiar to most readers of these pages, his confession after 9/11 reveals how easily internationalism can slide into narcissism, the most provincial spirit of all:

> On that day I shared the general register of feeling, from disgust to rage, but was also aware of something that would not quite disclose itself. It only became fully evident quite late that evening. And to my surprise (and pleasure), it was exhilaration.... here was a direct, unmistakable confrontation between everything I loved and everything I hated. On one side, the ethics of the multicultural, the secular, the skeptical, and the cosmopolitan.... On the other, the arid monochrome of dull and vicious theocratic fascism. I am prepared for this war to go on for a very long time.

Corey Robin, author of Fear: The History of a Political Idea *(Oxford), teaches political science at Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center of the City University of New York.*

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I will never become tired of waging it, because it is a fight over essentials. And because it is so interesting.

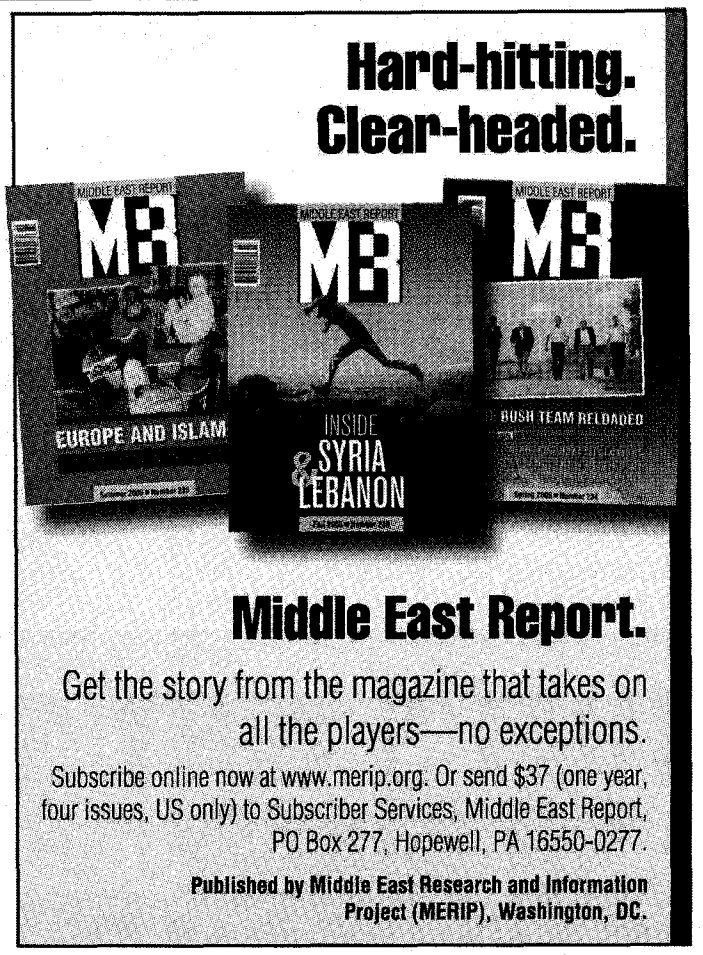
More recently, Paul Berman has called the war in Iraq this generation's Spanish Civil War. Berman's own biography, of course, makes mincemeat of the analogy. Spain's civil war demanded, in Stephen Spender's words, "a very personal involvement." But unlike George Orwell, André Malraux or any of the other writers who fought for the Spanish Republic, Berman has yet to pick up a gun to defend the Iraqi government. Martha Gellhorn claimed that Spain's foreign fighters "knew why they came, and what they thought about living and dying, both. But it is nothing you can ask or talk about." Yet all Berman can do is talk... and talk and talk. Meanwhile, the only international volunteers who seem to believe that Iraq is worth fighting and dying for are joining the other side.

But the real reason Berman's analogy does not hold up is that where yesterday's progressive insisted that the struggle for freedom and equality was a two-front war—"if freedom and equality are not vouchsafed" for "the peoples of color" at home, A. Philip Randolph wrote in 1942, "the war for democracy will not be won" abroad—Berman and his allies hope to find in Iraq precisely what they cannot find in the United States. Trotskyists of defeat, they export revolution not in order to save it but in order to evade it.

Liberals and leftists panning for political gold in the wreckage of downtown Baghdad—or New York—is not a pretty sight, which has led some critics to chalk up these scenes to illicit motives. But the infatuation with political fear and imperial deliverance from evil cannot be explained away as mere opportunism. It has a long history in modern politics, arising whenever reform comes up against reaction, whenever movements for progress lose their bearings and buoyancy. At such moments of doubt, nothing can seem as real as fear itself, nothing more tempting than to make evil—and the fear it arouses—the basis of all politics.

It was Alexis de Tocqueville, I think, who first noticed this tendency. In one of his lesser-known writings on the French Revolution, Tocqueville noted the inevitable deceleration and disillusionment that consume failed movements of reform. After every great defeat comes a great despair. Comrade accuses comrade of treachery or cowardice, soldiers denounce generals for marching them toward folly and everyone is soon seized by what Tocqueville described as the "contempt" that broken revolutionaries "acquire for the very convictions and passions" that moved them in the first place. Forced to abandon the cause for which they gave up so much, failed rebels "turn against themselves and consider their hopes as having been childish—their enthusiasm and, above all, their devotion absurd."

Since the 1960s, liberals and leftists have been beaten at the polls and routed in the streets. Equality no longer propels political argument, and freedom—that other sometime watchword of the left—is today the private property of the right. Unable to reconcile themselves to their loss, liberals and leftists are now seized by the contempt and embarrassment Tocqueville described. Berman cringes over the "androidal" complexion of sixties sectarians, with their "short haircuts" and "flabby muscles," their "flat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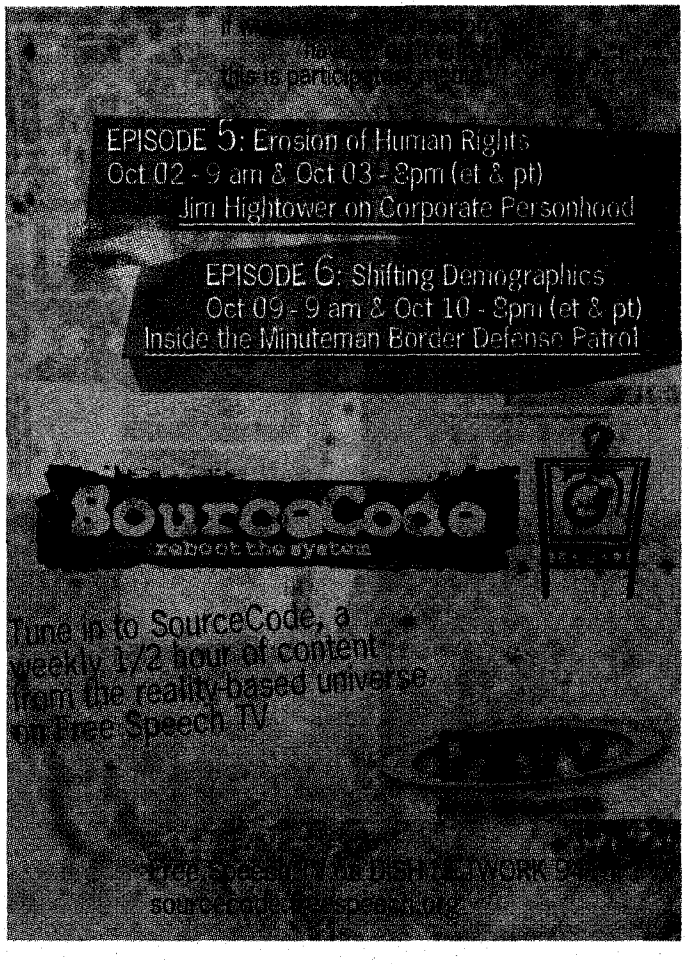
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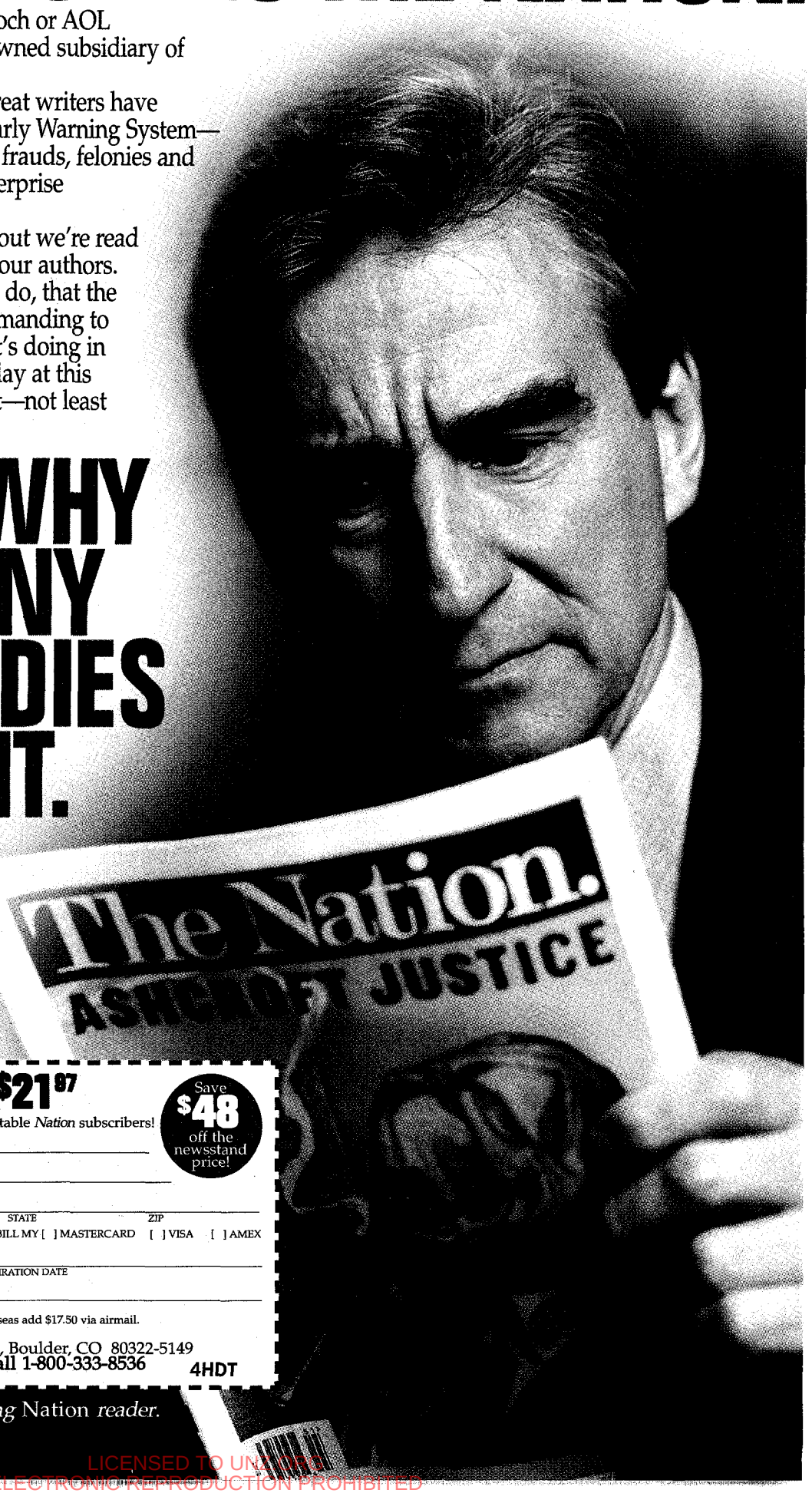

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tones" of Marxism so "oddly remote from American English." Others wince at the left's lack of patriotic fervor and national identification, its hostility to all things American.

Lacking confidence in the traditional truths of God and king and the revolutionary truths of reason and rights, Tocqueville hoped that his contemporaries might find succor in the idea of fear, which could activate and ground a commitment to liberal ideals. "Fear," he wrote, "must be put to work on behalf of liberty." And so he dedicated himself to a career of liberal pursuits whose only success would be a scheme of mild improvement in Algeria—and leadership of the counterrevolution in 1848.

So has it been with today's liberals: However much they may argue for domestic reform, it is liberalism's conquering thrusts abroad—and assaults on the left at home—that earn their warmest applause. Again, other factors explain this turn to empire and fear, including the appalling violations of human rights throughout the world and the left's failure to respond adequately to those violations. But given this vision's periodic appearance at moments like ours—one could also cite the case of cold war intellectuals offering their own politics of fear after the setbacks of the late 1940s—it would seem that the appeal of fear has as much to do with defeat and disillusionment as it does with the stated concerns of its advocates.

It is liberalism's conquering thrusts abroad—and assaults on the left at home—that earn the warmest applause.

If Oscar Wilde is right—that you can't reason a man out of a position he has not reasoned himself into—it's not likely that the liberals of fear will be persuaded anytime soon to give up their faith. (Indeed, proving that nothing succeeds like failure, Peter Beinart, editor of *The New Republic*, has taken the Democrats' defeat last November as the signal for a renewed commitment to the liberalism of fear.) Responding to political forces beyond their control, they won't cede their beliefs until a vigorous movement marches past them. The question for the rest of us is: What should that movement stand for?

For some on the left, liberalism is a bankrupt project, hopelessly compromised by its alliance with capital and indulgence of empire. These critics see liberalism as a weak tea—too suspicious of social movements, too soft on capitalism. They long for a stronger brew: if not Marxism, then some notion of radical democracy.

No dispassionate observer of American liberalism would dispute these charges, and some liberals happily plead guilty to them. But what critics and defenders of liberalism overlook is how often liberalism has inspired the most radical of transformations. The war against slavery, the fight for industrial democracy, the struggle for women's rights, civil rights and sexual freedom—each of these battles was waged in the name of liberty and equality, twin pillars of the liberal ideal.

Hoping to emancipate men and women from all manner of domination, America's greatest social movements have sought to extend liberalism's promise to every sphere of social and political life: the family, the workplace, sexuality and so on. Liberalism's earliest armies marched against the personal—and physically coercive—rule of kings and lords. Its later militants have made war on the equally personal and physical rule of husbands and fathers, slave owners and overseers, bosses and supervisors. That idea—of freedom from external control, of personal volition, of saying no to those who rule and ruin us—is as radical today as it was in the time of John Locke.

Even America's most left-wing voices have found in liberalism a useful vocabulary to advance their claims. Big Bill Haywood defended the general strike as a potent form of electoral democracy: It "prevents the capitalists from disfranchising the worker, it gives the vote to women, it re-enfranchises the black man and places the ballot in the hands of every boy and girl employed in a shop." Malcolm X did not favor the bullet over the ballot; he insisted that "it's got to be the ballot or the bullet," that America had better live up to its ideals lest it face a more violent uprising. Stokely Carmichael defined black power as "the coming-together of black people to elect representatives and *to force those representatives to speak to their needs*," which is a fairly good gloss on liberal pluralism. And we would do well to recall that the Black Panther Party repeatedly invoked the Constitution in its ten-point platform. More recently, Katha Pollitt has argued in these pages that if America took seriously the liberal commitment to equal opportunity, everyone would have "safe housing...healthy diets, doctors, fresh air...well-stocked libraries open all week"—Sweden itself.

There is perhaps no better measure of how radical and disruptive liberalism truly is than the ferocity of American elites' resistance to it. It took more than a half-million lives to eliminate slavery. American workers suffered more strike-related violence than workers in Western Europe—just to get an eight-hour day, freedom of association and a weekend. And imagine how many feet would have to march—and heads would have to roll—to secure the equal opportunity Pollitt envisions.

Liberalism's radical critics are not wrong about its failings and compromises. Nor would they be wrong to point out that the defenders of America's old regimes have used liberal language to fend off challenges to their power. Slaveholders invoked the rights of private property, employers prized the freedom of contract, and big business still warns against big government. But these are not liberalism's only or finest statements. If we are to recover its throatier voices and political momentum, we would do well to recall those moments when it marched as the party of movement rather than when it swilled as the party of order.

Of course, liberal hawks might argue that this history of liberal activism perfectly expresses their purposes in the Middle East. Indeed, Hitchens has mustered Thomas Paine and the American Revolution for his war against Islamo-fascism, arguing that America is once again fighting for "the cause of all mankind." Beyond pointing out the evident hypocrisy—and wild implausibility—of a government reneging on the most basic liberal commitments at home while trumpeting its final triumph abroad, what's a progressive to say to this? If we object to the marriage of human rights and American military power, what do we propose instead?

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Again, American history provides an instructive answer. In the past, America's most radical liberals looked to the rest of the world not as a *tabula rasa* for imperial reform but as a rebuke to illiberalism at home or a goad to domestic transformation. "Go where you may," Frederick Douglass declared in 1852, "search where you will, roam through all the monarchies and despotisms of the old world, travel through South America, search out every abuse, and when you have found the last, lay your facts by the side of the everyday practices of this nation, and you will say with me, that for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival."

In 1963 Martin Luther King Jr. reminded Americans that "the nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we still creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter." Even mainstream leaders of the National Organization for Women argued in 1966 that the American feminist movement was not a beacon to the world but "part of the worldwide revolution of human rights now taking place within and beyond our national borders."

America under the Patriot Act is obviously not America under slavery, and the anticolonial movements that inspired King and feminists in the 1960s have not fared well. Yet this history reminds us that American liberalism, at its best, has always been internationalist, but its internationalism has meant taking instruction and provocation from abroad rather than flying freedom across the water.

Liberalism's past also reminds us of another, more sobering, fact. During the second half of the twentieth century, progressives were able to look abroad for inspiration because there was something for them to look to. They could believe in international democracy because there were actual movements fighting for it—not under the kitschy banner of the American empire or through staged photo-ops of toppling statues but for real. If we on the left have a hard time today summoning the same belief, it's because at the very moment those activists were heralding liberation movements elsewhere, the United States was doing everything it could—successfully, we now know—to destroy them.

It's true that there are democratic movements today—in Latin America, the Middle East and Central Asia—that deserve and receive progressives' support. But there's always the risk of the US government hijacking them with arms or handouts. And though liberal hawks like to cite the occupations of Germany and Japan as models for current or future US interventions, we should remember that the New Dealers who led those occupations were far more liberal than the occupiers of today and—until something fundamental changes in the United States—tomorrow. Foreign assistance or interventions are not likely to generate democracy abroad if the powers doing the assisting or intervening are so resolutely antidemocratic at home.

So if we find ourselves at a loss when challenged by liberal hawks—who are right, after all, to press us on how to promote democracy in Iraq, human rights in Sudan and so on—it's best, I think, first to admit defeat. We don't know, because we lost the great battles of the twentieth century: not just for social democracy and anti-imperialism but for social democracy and anti-imperialism with a human face. Having admitted defeat, perhaps we can begin to figure out a better answer. ■

HOW ANXIETY ABOUT NATIONAL SECURITY CHANGED THE CLIMATE IN ONE SMALL TOWN.

Terror on the Inner Border

SASHA ABRAMSKY

Havre, Montana

Al Qaeda's murderous assault on New York City and Washington on September 11, 2001, set off a chain reaction that has transformed the political discourse in the United States and sent reverberations around the world. At the same time, it has altered the way communities throughout this vast country function and the assumptions by which individuals in cities and hamlets across the millions of square miles that are America live their lives. Even in tiny outposts like Havre, Montana (population 9,621), less than fifty square miles of sparsely settled farmland south of the border with Canada, a profound cultural and psychological shift has occurred.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

Havre—traditionally a rather lawless western cowboy community—now considers itself a front-line town in the battle to secure America's borders and defend its open interior, and its politicians and businessmen have enthusiastically, and largely uncritically, embraced their town's new role. It has become a key operational base for northern Border Patrol sorties, and Amtrak trains stopping in the old Havre train station are now routinely boarded by Border Patrol officers looking for noncitizens who lack the paperwork needed to stay in the country legally. In a country at war with a faceless enemy, many of the residents of Havre have convinced themselves that it has become a stomping ground for terrorists and that Border Patrol sweeps of its trains and train station are an effective way to combat these enemies within.

There is no doubt that the United States does face real threats,

Sasha Abramsky is a senior fellow for democracy at Demos, a New York City think tank. His book Conned, *on voting rights in America, will be published by the New Press in March.*

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but in many ways Havre has become a modern-day Potemkin Village. It is a place where expensive, resource-intensive Border Patrol activities provide the illusion of counterterrorism effectiveness while mainly netting only tourists who have overstayed their visas, illegal immigrants from Latin America hopping around the country in search of jobs, and would-be refugees and asylum seekers. As Americans, faced with a fanatical foe, have traded in constitutional protections for promises of security, ceding core freedoms and principles in exchange for ever-tougher law-enforcement actions that merely create comforting holograms of safety, so Havre provides a window onto the patterns that have taken hold in the nation at large.

The Havre sector office of the Border Patrol is responsible for securing hundreds of miles of the northern border, running across several states, and since September 2001 dozens of agents have been relocated here from the Mexican border, bringing with them a warrior mentality formed during years of struggles with drug gangs, people-smuggling coyotes and thousands of desperate migrants seeking hope north of the border. Stopping people as they come off the trains at Havre (the only station for hundreds of miles at which the trains stop for more than a couple of minutes) is one of the jobs to which these agents have been assigned. The railway sweeps started in the late 1990s as a part of the "war on drugs." Since 9/11, however, these spot passenger inspections have been massively expanded.

Border Patrol activities provide the illusion of counterterrorism effectiveness, creating comforting holograms of safety.

Havre's residents generally aren't complaining. Its leaders seem to enjoy all the new activity and attention. And the arrival of about forty federal agents and their families in town in 2003–04 provided a much-needed boost to the local economy, which had taken a beating in recent years because of the depopulation of the plains and collapsing agriculture prices.

Realtors like Mary Blair recall that the influx of well-paid federal agents pushed up housing prices by 10 percent or more. High-end houses that had been on the market for months suddenly sold. "It was a delight to have a number of new families come into the community," says Blair. "It was like a breath of fresh air." The schools, which, according to Superintendent Kirk Miller, had seen a 25 percent decline in enrollment over the previous decade, saw their numbers stabilize, bringing in state dollars that were tied to the size of the school population. Home-improvement and furniture stores, restaurants and car dealerships all saw their business increase.

"It's difficult to talk about it from an economic perspective, because you know what's behind the buildup [of Border Patrol agents] is the tragedy of 9/11 and the whole international war on terror," says Paul Tuss, the ebullient director of the local Bear Paw Development Corporation. "Although, from a parochial interest we certainly appreciate the day-to-day economic activity it's brought to the region. There's obviously a trickle-down effect. I wouldn't say our economy is hot right now, but for this reason and for other reasons the Havre economy is a tick up from where it was two or three years ago."

Not surprisingly, Havre has welcomed the Border Patrol—the protection it affords and the federal dollars that come with it—with open arms. When the Border Patrol was debating where to situate a quick-response air unit, complete with Black Hawk helicopters, the mayor, the three county commissioners and the development corporation lobbied heavily—although ultimately unsuccessfully—to have it located in Havre. "There's a little more sense of security here, increased surveillance. You see 'em [Border Patrol agents] downtown, you see 'em in the coffeeshops," says 57-year-old retired naval officer and current mayor Bob Rice, sitting in an office with a Navy poster outside that says LIFE, LIBERTY AND THE PURSUIT OF ALL WHO THREATEN THEM.

The mayor wears a tie printed with the American flag, and his jacket lapel sports a mini star-spangled pin. "Before 9/11," he continues, "we had about fifteen Border Patrol agents here. We didn't think too much about the border, about terrorism. We used to make jokes about the border crossing. Post-9/11 we now have a different emphasis on the border. We now realize the bad guys could come across. We're being programmed to be more aware, more intense with vagrants around. I've personally put out a memo to employees to keep aware of what's around, to keep vehicles gassed up in case we need to transport water, people, equipment. We realize now that if the bad guys come across, they're only forty-nine miles from Havre. The community as a whole is—I don't want to use the word 'suspicious,' but they're more observant."

Most days, two or three Border Patrol vans, big white vehicles with the green agency stripes running horizontally along their midriff, pull up to the Havre station and park next to the vast nineteenth-century locomotive that sits as a museum piece just to the side of the tracks. Inside the vans green-uniformed officers sit and wait.

At 1:12 PM Amtrak's eastbound Empire Builder passenger train stops at the single-platform station. At 2:39 PM, the westbound train arrives on the same track. As the trains pull in, the crew-cut officers bound out of their vans. Some stand on the platforms, some enter the station's waiting room, others board the trains as they come to a halt. Passengers looking for better food than the dining car's mediocre fare, or just wanting to stretch their legs and snap some photos, pile off the train. For a few minutes, this tiny corner of Havre becomes a multinational, multiethnic oasis in a sea of white.

During this stop Border Patrol agents, aided by local police and sheriff's officers, as well as by Amtrak officials, routinely board trains and question riders. "They were walking along the train asking everybody if they were US citizens," recalls 23-year-old Alan Whelan, an Irishman from Waterford, who was arrested in Havre after Border Patrol agents discovered he had overstayed his tourist visa and who then spent a month being shunted among different detention centers before being deported home last winter.

They also stop people inside the waiting area. "I got off the train to make a phone call," recalls Vietnamese national Jo Jo (last name withheld), who was arrested at Havre in March

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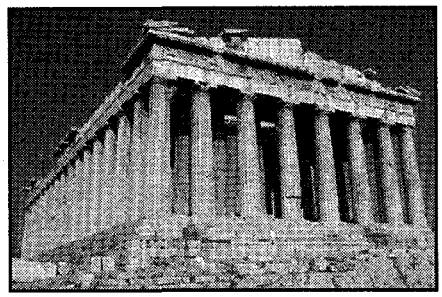

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Parthenon, Acropolis, Athens, Greece.

About Your Professor

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2004 while traveling east to a Cambodian friend's funeral—by train because he couldn't afford a last-minute round-trip airfare. "When I turned to get back on the train, I saw the Border Patrol. He stopped me, his body in front of the doorway, to ask me if I'm a US citizen. I said, 'Not yet.' I showed him my Washington State driver's license; he said, 'Not enough.' I showed him my Social Security card. He said, 'Not enough.' Another guy came to grab me. They told me to go back to the train to get my suitcase. They followed me. Back to my car. They handcuffed me. Put my body on the ground and cuffed me."

Jo Jo had been living in the United States for several years since fleeing Vietnam after the government began harassing him for organizing tours for Americans searching for MIAs from the Vietnam War. He'd been trying to qualify for refugee status and had an attorney working on his case. In 1998, while living in New Orleans, he'd been charged with violating the terms of his admission to the United States; that April, however, a judge had found him "non-deportable." Now, six years later, arrested by the Havre Border Patrol, Jo Jo was bused to a holding facility in Colorado, where last fall an immigration judge denied his asylum application and ordered him deported. (In a cruel twist, Jo Jo's 2005 work permit arrived in the mail the same day he was ordered deported.) He is currently appealing the ruling. If he loses, he's likely to be sent back to a country he fled ten years earlier, where he feels he would be in even greater danger than when he left.

Habeeb, a refugee from Saddam's Iraq, was picked up in Havre, arrested, incarcerated and threatened with deportation.

Or consider the story of Iraqi refugee Abdul Ameer Yousef Habeeb. On April 1, 2003, a few weeks after the start of military operations in the Gulf, Habeeb got off the Empire Builder in Havre to buy a soft drink in the station's waiting room. He was en route from Seattle, where he worked in a furniture warehouse, to Chicago and then on to Washington, where he says he'd been promised a job on a start-up Arabic-language newspaper.

Habeeb's brother had been killed by Saddam Hussein's security forces, his father had died in a suspicious car crash and Habeeb himself had been repeatedly tortured for what he understatedly terms "political problems" with the government. He had fled to Syria, been granted refugee status by the Immigration and Naturalization Service office in Athens, been issued a letter from the US Embassy in Damascus confirming his refugee status and in July 2002, through the Los Angeles airport, had been admitted to the United States as a refugee. From start to finish, the process had been well documented. Now, traveling within his new country, Habeeb wanted to put the past behind him.

"I see one guy in a uniform," Habeeb recalled almost two years later. "He looked to me for a minute, and that makes me worry. I tried to go back to the train. And when I tried, he followed me and stopped between me and the train. He ask me, 'Where are you from?' I said, 'I'm from Iraq.' He ask me how I get to America and what I'm doing here. I told him I'm a political refugee and the American government brought me here. I show him my documents, and he asks me many, many questions. Another guy in a uniform come and ask me questions. He ask me if I did the registration. I was really scared, and when I asked him what does 'the registration' mean, he said you have to go to office in Seattle to give fingerprints and photo."

The registration the Border Patrol agents were referring to is a "special registration" program enacted post-9/11 that mandates that immigrants from a list of countries, mainly in the Middle East, register on a regular basis with immigration authorities. The program, however, specifically excludes refugees. But Habeeb's papers were confiscated, he was arrested and questioned over several hours by Border Patrol and FBI agents. Habeeb had suddenly become Case No. HVR0304000003 A079 854 029. He claims he was put into a small room with cameras and a microphone, that he was asked whether he had friends from Saudi Arabia and whether he knew anyone who talked about America in a critical way. There was, he says, a small cage in the room, which he feared he would be put into, and on the wall, Habeeb claims, was a photograph of a bearded man tied to a chair with a rag around his eyes. Whether these allegations are true is impossible to confirm, since the Border Patrol refused to comment on the case.

Late that night the Iraqi was transferred to the county jail, where he spent three days being verbally tormented by inmates who sneeringly called him "Saddam."

From northern Montana Habeeb was flown to an Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) facility in Seattle, where he underwent more questioning. Brought before an immigration judge, with no attorney representing him, the refugee was again told—erroneously—that he had broken the law by not registering and that he would be deported.

Luckily for Habeeb, a local watchdog organization monitoring the ICE facility found out about his case, and several days later, with the help of immigration attorneys at the Seattle firm of MacDonald, Hoague and Bayless, Habeeb was released. More than a month after that, on May 16, the deportation case was dismissed. In the interim, however, Habeeb lost his new job; and, he says, he became a pariah, with acquaintances reluctant to associate with someone the government apparently believed to be a possible terrorist.

This past March 17, ACLU attorneys working on behalf of Habeeb announced that they were suing two Border Patrol agents in Montana for unspecified damages. A related federal tort claim filed against the Border Patrol agency itself, as well as ICE, seeks $600,000 in compensation for Habeeb's being wrongly arrested, incarcerated and threatened with deportation.

Whether the Havre sector agents are questioning everyone at the station, profiling people who simply look "different," as Habeeb's and Jo Jo's cases suggest, or are working from Amtrak passenger manifests—many immigration attorneys believe that after the Patriot Act was passed, Border Patrol agents began accessing these manifests—is unclear, because neither Border Patrol officials nor Amtrak would comment on the matter. What is clear, however, is that the expansion of Havre's Border Patrol office has resulted in a significant rise

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in the numbers of illegal aliens being arrested in town, held in the Hill County Detention Center and then entered into ICE's labyrinthine, often Kafkaesque, detention system. "There's more individuals arrested by the Border Patrol, more inmates for the detention facility," acknowledges Sheriff Greg Szudera, who runs the county jail. The jail's daily logs bear witness to this steady flow of "illegals." In the four months from October 1, 2004, through January 31, 2005, fifty-five Border Patrol detainees were booked into the detention center.

During these months the majority of those arrested were Latino; names like Castellanos, Vicente, Rodriguez and Garcia dot this roster. There were also Indian, Bangladeshi, Irish and Italian names and, among them, a handful of Arabic ones: an Ahmed in December, a Mohamed in January. Were any of these detainees security threats? That was something the Border Patrol wasn't prepared to comment on. David Bernard, the assistant chief of the Havre sector office, working out of a headquarters building on a hill next to the town's ice dome, was happy to tell me about his move from Laredo, Texas, to Havre; but he wouldn't tell me how many arrests his agents had made, what criteria they used in determining whom to ask for ID and paperwork or what legal justifications they relied on for stopping people at random inside the train station and questioning them about their citizenship status.

A zone is being locked in place on the outer perimeter of the United States where the Constitution is no longer fully operable.

If the Empire Builder's riders answer that they are not US citizens, the federal agents, working under Department of Homeland Security mandates, demand proof that they are in the country legally. Most of those they interrogate are too intimidated to ask by what right they are being questioned. Were they to do so, the agents could recite to them a list of Supreme Court rulings dealing with cases from the Southwest that have, in recent years, expanded the right of law-enforcement officers to demand that people produce ID upon being stopped, and have limited the "probable cause" requirements for searching and interrogating a person within a certain number of miles of an international border.

Intercepted foreigners who cannot produce the needed visas and residency documents—and even some, like Habeeb, who can—are handcuffed, arrested and taken to the Hill County jail. They are allowed to contact attorneys, but many apparently are so confused that they do not. When enough "illegals" have been netted to warrant a transport south, they're collected by the Border Patrol, shackled and bused or flown first to a processing center in Idaho and then, in a procedural change instituted months after Habeeb's arrest, on to a 340-bed detention facility in Aurora, a suburb of Denver, run on behalf of ICE by the private company GEO Group.

One of the consequences of this journey to Aurora is that the detainees are removed from Montana, which falls under the jurisdiction of the liberal Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals, to Colorado, which is within the boundaries of the far more conservative Tenth Circuit. Whereas the Ninth Circuit judges are often sympathetic to those claiming refugee status or asylum and more reluctant to deport noncitizens who have been convicted of low-level crimes, the Tenth Circuit, according to attorneys like Regina Germain, author of a book on asylum law and onetime attorney with the UN High Commission for Refugees, shows no such circumspection. "A low-level crime doesn't qualify as a 'drug trafficking offense' in the Ninth Circuit but does in the Tenth Circuit," says Germain. "If your hearing is in the Ninth Circuit, you'll stay in the country. If it's in the Tenth Circuit, you'll be deported."

Some of those arrested and bundled off to Colorado have been in the process of applying for asylum or for refugee status. "It seems like, in the summer, I was getting calls a couple times a week," says Montana immigration attorney Debbie Smith, of the firm Reynolds, Motl and Sherwood. One of the women who contacted Smith was from El Salvador; she had fled her abusive husband and managed to get to Portland, Oregon. From there, she was trying to take the train to visit her sister in New Jersey. Instead, she was arrested in Havre and ended up in the immigration detention system.

At the other end of the bus ride from Havre to the detention facility in Colorado, Rocky Mountain Immigrant Advocacy Network attorneys recall having had about fifteen clients in 2004 who had been plucked off the train at Havre. These men and women, the attorneys say, were from countries ranging from Uganda and Gambia to Nicaragua and Israel.

The routinization of checks like those now conducted at the Havre train station, and the culture of suspicion cultivated in such towns, are creating the psychological conditions and responses of a population under a national identity card system. A zone is being locked in place on the outer perimeter of the United States (within about 100 miles of a border) where people can be stopped, required to present ID and submit to intensive questioning without probable cause that they have committed a crime. Inside this inner border, the Constitution is no longer fully operable. With no evidence that would-be terrorists are being caught in this net, the question becomes whether the "benefit" of catching a few visa overstays or illegal migrant workers offsets the cost to civil liberties of having federal officers demanding identity papers of all and sundry miles from an international border and, in the process, shredding the Constitution's protections against illegal search and seizure.

"It has disturbing implications," says immigration law specialist Dan Kowalski of Austin, Texas. "What I've been watching with some dismay is our slow slide into a national identity system, while all the time saying we don't have one and aren't going to have one. The hydraulic pressure of 9/11 means there will be Congressional pressure toward a national ID."

As for Abdul Habeeb, two years on he is still trying to pick up the pieces of his life. "When I looked to the Statue of Liberty pictures in Iraq, I thought the freedom and democracy in this country was number-one around the world—and that nobody can stop anybody if he's done nothing wrong. I thought I'd be, in America, secure. Now, every night I fear somebody coming. Always, really, I'm scared." ■

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A CULTURE OF SUSPICION GREETS THOSE WHO SEEK REFUGE IN THE UNITED STATES.

Not Your Homeland

EDWIDGE DANTICAT

From the outside, it looks like any other South Florida hotel. There is a pool, green grass and tall palms bordering the parking lot. An ordinary guest may not even be aware that his or her stopover for the night is indeed a prison, a holding facility for women and children who have fled their countries, in haste, in desperation, hoping for a better life.

PETER O. ZIERLEIN

A year and four months after September 11, 2001, I visited, along with some friends, a Comfort Suites hotel in Miami where several Haitian women and children are jailed. One of the people we met there was a 3-year-old girl who had been asking for a single thing for weeks. The little girl wanted to sit under one of those tall palm trees in the hotel courtyard, feel the sunshine on her face and touch the green grass with her feet. Tearfully, her mother said she could not grant her that. Nor could she even dream of it for herself.

We also met a little boy who was wearing one of the gray adult-size T-shirts all the detainees in the hotel wore. There was no uniform small enough for him, so the little boy didn't have pants. We met a pretty young woman who told us that she'd lost a lot of weight, not only because of the sorrow that plagued her constrained life—a life in which she was forbidden even to stand in the hotel hallway—but also because she couldn't bring herself to eat. The food she was fed would neither "stay up nor down," she said. Either she vomited it or it gave her diarrhea.

The women in that hotel also told us how six of them must live together in one room, how some of them were forced to sleep on the floor when there wasn't enough space on the beds or couches. They told us how they missed their own clothes and seeing their children play in the sun, how they had perhaps been wrong about America. Maybe it no longer had any room for them. Maybe it had mistaken them for criminals or terrorists.

Once we were quickly ushered out of the hotel, my mind returned to the Krome Detention Center in Miami, which we had visited earlier that day. Even before setting foot on its premises, Krome had always seemed like a strange myth to me, a cross between Alcatraz and hell. I'd imagined it as something like the Brooklyn Navy Yard detention center, where my parents had taken me on Sunday afternoons in the early 1980s, when I was a teenager in New York, to visit with Haitian asylum seekers we did not know but feared we might, people who, as my father used to say, "could have very well been us."

Krome's silent despair became tangible when a group of Haitian men in identical dark-blue uniforms walked into a barbed wire courtyard to address our delegation that morning. "My name is..." they began. "I came on the July boat." Or, "I came on the December boat." Or the most famous one of all, the October 29, 2002, boat, the landing of which was broadcast live on CNN and other national television outlets.

As if suddenly empowered by this brief opportunity to break their silence, the men spoke in clear, loud voices, some inventing parables to explain their circumstances. One man told the story of a mad dog that forced a person to seek shelter at a neighbor's house. "If mad dogs are chasing you, shouldn't your neighbor shelter you?" he asked.

One man asked us to tell the world that the detainees were sometimes beaten. He told us of a friend who had his back broken by a guard and was deported before he could get medical attention. They said that the rooms they slept in were so cold that they shivered all night long. They spoke of arbitrary curfews, how they were woken up at 6 AM and forced to go back to those cold rooms by 6 PM.

One man said, "If I had a bullet, I'd have shot myself already. I'm not a criminal. I'm not used to prison."

I met an older man who came from Bel Air, the same area in Port-au-Prince where I spent the first twelve years of my life. His eyes were red. He couldn't stop crying. His mother had died the week before, he said, and he was heartbroken that he couldn't attend her funeral.

Two months after that visit, then–Attorney General John Ashcroft vetoed an immigration judge's decision to release an 18-year-old Haitian boy named David Joseph, whom we'd met at Krome that day. Ashcroft argued that Joseph had to remain in custody because he posed a threat to national security. He further stated that Haiti harbors Pakistani and Palestinian terrorists, but the government could offer no proof for this charge in response to a Freedom of Information Act request from the Florida Immigration Advocacy Center. The truth was that, like many of the other refugees we had seen that day, David Joseph had fled his home not because he wanted to harm the United States but because it was impossible for him to live in his own country. Scorned by their neighbors for their parents' political views, he and his brother had been stoned and burned, their father severely beaten. Had he not fled, he would have been killed.

In November 2004 David Joseph was deported after two years in detention, even though the area in Haiti where he was from had recently been devastated by a season of tropical storms that resulted in 3,000 deaths and left a quarter-million people homeless. He also had no family to return to, since no one knew, least of all him, whether any of his relatives were alive or dead.

This article is adapted from the foreword to We Are All Suspects Now: Untold Stories From Immigrant Communities After 9/11 *by Tram Nguyen (Beacon). Edwidge Danticat's most recent book is* The Dew Breaker *(Vintage).*

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Teaching 9/11

9/11 is history—but how is it being taught to students in history courses? George Bush and other conservatives maintain that the attacks were acts of evil; liberals, while they condemn the attacks, see them as having a social and political context that we need to understand. These differences are reflected in the debate over the textbooks written in the past three years.

Conservatives complain that the teaching of 9/11 has been "simplified and sanitized" in an effort "not to...upset special interest groups," in the words of Chester Finn, assistant secretary of education in the Reagan Administration, who wrote the foreword to *A Consumer's Guide to High School History Textbooks*, by Diane Ravitch, assistant secretary of education in the Bush Sr. Administration. Finn and Ravitch, who based their conclusions on a reading of six of the most widely assigned textbooks in high school history courses, complained that students reading the textbooks "would scarcely learn that anybody in particular had organized these savage attacks...much less why."

Finn and Ravitch are right about some of the texts. *America: Pathways to the Present*, by Andrew Cayton et al., says in its 2005 edition that the "prime suspect" in the attacks was Osama bin Laden, but he is described only as "a wealthy Saudi dissident." "Saudi dissident" is hardly the right term—a student might get the impression he was fighting for Saudi women's rights. The book goes on to say that bin Laden had been granted sanctuary by the Taliban in Afghanistan, but the Taliban are described only as a "group" that "sought to set up their version of a pure Islamic state, banning such things as television and music." From the perspective of an American tenth grader, this is typical of tyrants everywhere—starting with their own parents, punishing them for bad grades. As an explanation of the "who" and "why" of 9/11, the discussion in *Pathways* might best be termed "incoherent."

Several other leading texts do much better. *The American Republic*, by Joyce Appleby et al., has a section on 9/11 in its 2005 edition, written by Alan Brinkley of the Columbia University history department, that provides a wonderfully clear and thorough explanation of the "who" and "why" of 9/11, starting with bin Laden's role in the resistance to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. "Bin Laden's experience in Afghanistan convinced him that superpowers could be beaten. He also believed that Western ideas had contaminated Muslim society. He was outraged when Saudi Arabia allowed American troops on Saudi soil after Iraq invaded Kuwait." He therefore began a series of attacks seeking to drive Americans out of the Middle East. 9/11 was the most spectacular in this series of attacks.

A different approach can be found in *The American Promise*, by James Roark et al., an introductory college text that is the most widely adopted textbook in the market. It is assigned in dozens of high schools, public and private, including public schools in Atlanta, Newark and Chicago. A section written by Susan Hartmann, who teaches history at Ohio State, identifies bin Laden's goals and then explains the "why" of his finding supporters: "High levels of poverty ignored by undemocratic and corrupt governments provided bin Laden a pool of disaffected young Muslims who saw the United States as the evil source of their misery and the supporter of Israel's oppression of Palestinian Muslims." A companion volume of historical documents, edited by Michael Johnson, includes the famous President's Daily Brief from August 6, 2001: "bin Laden Determined to Strike in the US"; the text of Bush's address on September 20, 2001: "they hate us...[because] they hate our freedoms"; and an Al Qaeda training manual posted on the Justice Department website.

Probably the best textbook on 9/11 is Eric Foner's *Give Me Liberty*, a new introductory college text that has been adopted at more than 300 institutions in its first year. It is also assigned in some high school AP classes, ranging from suburban New Trier Township High School in Illinois to Transit Tech High School in Brooklyn. Foner (a member of *The Nation*'s editorial board), in addition to explaining bin Laden's opposition to specific US policies, also examines the Bush Administration's response—declaring suspect citizens "enemy combatants" and creating secret military tribunals—and places these decisions in historical context. He finds parallels between this response and previous efforts to limit civil liberties in the name of security: suspension of habeas corpus during the Civil War, persecution of German-Americans during World War I and Japanese-Americans during World War II, McCarthyism during the cold war. Foner thus connects the response to 9/11 with larger themes in American history, asking, "What is the proper balance between liberty and security? Who deserves the full enjoyment of American freedom?"

Of course, critics on the right object to this kind of teaching. Lynne Cheney, wife of the Vice President and former head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, said in a 2001 speech that those who argue that 9/11 shows we need to learn more about the rest of the world were blaming America's "failure to understand Islam" for the attacks. Dinesh D'Souza made a similar argument in his 2002 book *What's So Great About America*, and William Bennett, in his 2002 book *Why We Fight*, spoke out against historians who "weaken the country's resolve." Foner rejects these arguments. He insists, in an article about the problems and opportunities in teaching 9/11, that "Explanation is not a justification for murder, criticism is not equivalent to treason, and offering a historical analysis of evil is not the same thing as consorting with evil." If Finn and Ravitch really support teaching about 9/11 that isn't "simplified and sanitized," conceding the validity of those points would be a good place to start.

Whatever the merits of Foner's argument, problems with the teaching of 9/11 aren't likely to be resolved soon. Many high school students won't see any of the new texts because their schools are still using old books. Then there's the impact of Bush's No Child Left Behind Act: It requires standards and testing, and since teachers teach to the test, it's unclear how much 9/11 teaching there will be. In California, for example, the standards haven't been revised since 9/11, so "there's no specific standards that reflect it even happened," says Adam Wemmer, who teaches at Pacifica High School in Garden Grove. And finally, there's the simple matter of too much history, too little time. "The trouble," says Beth Anderson, who teaches at El Toro High School in Lake Forest, California, "is that no one manages to get to the Clinton years, much less 2001." JON WIENER

Jon Wiener (Wiener@uci.edu), a Nation *contributing editor, teaches history at UC, Irvine; his most recent book is* Historians in Trouble.

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In the fall of 2004 I too suffered a devastating loss in a way I had never expected or imagined.

On Sunday, October 24, 2004, United Nations troops and Haitian police forces launched an antigang operation in Bel Air, where my 81-year-old uncle, Joseph Dantica, had been living for fifty years. During the operation the UN "peacekeepers," accompanied by the Haitian police, used the roof of my uncle's three-story house, school and church compound to fire at the gangs. When the forces left Bel Air the gang members came to my uncle's home, told him that fifteen of their friends had been killed and said he had to pay for the burials or die. Knowing he'd never be able to produce the kind of money they were seeking, my uncle asked for a few minutes to make a phone call, grabbed some important papers and fled to a nearby house.

My uncle hid under a neighbor's bed for three days as the gang members searched for him. When they were not able to find him, they ransacked his home and church and set his office on fire. A few days later a family member helped him escape the neighborhood, and on October 29, 2004, he took a plane to Miami, just as he had done many times for more than thirty years. He had a valid multiple-entry visa. But when immigration officials at Miami International Airport asked how long he would be staying in the United States, he explained that he would be killed if he returned to Haiti and that he wanted "temporary" asylum. He was immediately arrested and taken to Krome, where medicine he had brought with him from Haiti for an inflamed prostate and high blood pressure was taken away from him. On November 3, 2004, while still in the custody of the Krome Detention Center, and thus the Department of Homeland Security, he died at a nearby hospital.

As my uncle lay dying in a hospital bed in a ward reserved for hardened criminals, my repeated requests to visit him were denied by Department of Homeland Security and Krome officials for what I was told were "security reasons." In other words, my uncle was treated like a criminal when his only offense was thinking that he could find shelter in the United States.

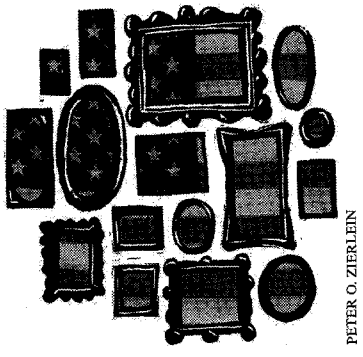
Before this tragedy struck our family, I had not quite heeded my father's warning and never truly believed that the asylum seekers we visited so often could really include one so close to us. However, nothing proves more than what happened to my uncle, an elderly man of the cloth, that we all live with a certain level of risk in post-9/11 America. Still, those of us who are refugees and exiles must live with the double menace of being both possible victims and suspects, sometimes with fatal consequences. Will America ever learn again how to protect itself without sacrificing a great many innocent lives? So that my uncle did not die in vain, I truly hope so. ■

TRUMPED-UP ACCUSATIONS FROM THE RIGHT HAVE HOBBLED WTC CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS.

Memorial Chauvinism

ALISA SOLOMON

Speaking at a rally shortly before the first anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, New York Governor George Pataki told the crowd how moved he was by a new exhibit he had just helped unveil at Madame Tussaud's in Times Square: a life-sized, carved-wax portrait of three firefighters raising the American flag out of the rubble at Ground Zero.



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

There are no plans to install a Madame Tussaud's at the World Trade Center site, but on the eve of 9/11's fourth anniversary, such imagery has come to define the sort of artistic expression and commentary allowable on this most sensitive piece of real estate. Since June a battle has been raging in lower Manhattan over the institutions slated for one of two cultural buildings called for in Daniel Liebeskind's master plan for the WTC site—and, with Pataki following the charge (his eye on national office), the right wing is winning.

The building, a horizontal box of glass and wood designed by the Norwegian firm Snøhetta, will occupy a corner of Ground Zero's "memorial quadrant," alongside the "Reflecting Absence" memorial and a museum containing artifacts and other material documenting the events of 9/11 and the people who were killed that day. Intended to provide a buffer between the heart of the memorial and the quotidian traffic and commerce surrounding the site, the Snøhetta Cultural Center was to house two of four organizations chosen by the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) last year from 113 applicants: the Drawing Center, an art museum based in SoHo since the late 1970s, and the brand-new International Freedom Center (IFC), a "multi-dimensional cultural institution combining history, education and engagement" that is the brainchild of Tom Bernstein, co-founder of Manhattan's high-end athletics complex, Chelsea Piers. Working in a yin-yang relationship with "Reflecting Absence" and the 9/11 museum, which commemorate loss, the IFC is "meant to honor regeneration, the living, and the positive," says Paula Grant Berry, the project's vice chair, whose husband, David, perished in the south tower of the WTC.

The Snøhetta design was unveiled with much celebratory hoopla on May 19. But by mid-August, after a flurry of attacks, the building was being scaled down in size and in danger of having no tenants. The Drawing Center had been driven away by

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censorship-like demands for oversight after trumped-up accusations that several works displayed over its twenty-eight-year history were "un-American." The IFC, meanwhile, was given until September 23 to provide detailed descriptions of its exhibits to assure the LMDC that it will forever heed a threat Pataki issued at a June press conference: "We will not tolerate anything on that site that denigrates America, denigrates New York or freedom, or denigrates the sacrifice and courage that the heroes showed on September 11." In mid-August the Uniformed Firefighters Association, a union representing some 22,000 active and retired New York City firefighters, announced it was withdrawing its support for the WTC Memorial Foundation, which oversees and raises funds for the quadrant, because of the "unacceptable" cultural institutions.

While the assault on the Drawing Center (launched by New York's *Daily News*) deployed the familiar artillery of the culture wars—misrepresentations of selective aspects of complex artworks—the battering of the IFC drew from the playbook of post-9/11 clampdowns on dissent. Not that IFC plans looked particularly radical. The idea for the museum came to Bernstein in the wake of 9/11 as he listened to George W. Bush deliver the 2002 State of the Union address. Appointed by Bush to the board of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, Bernstein is also a longtime board member of Human Rights First. He teamed up with Kunhardt Productions to develop the IFC, a celebration of the human aspiration to liberty.

Any effort to acknowledge America's failures to live up to the ideal of freedom is regarded as tantamount to siding with terrorists.

But as Eric Foner, author of *The Story of American Freedom* and erstwhile IFC advisory board member, points out, "freedom—America's defining characteristic—is a contested term. It does not have a fixed definition, but has been debated and struggled over through history." Suggested IFC exhibits featuring Thomas Paine, Abraham Lincoln, Mother Jones and Fannie Lou Hamer seem unobjectionable, if bland. Yet amid the take-no-prisoners atmosphere of the Administration, any effort to historicize the concept or to acknowledge America's failures to live up to this ideal by reminding viewers of struggles like those for workers' and civil rights is regarded as tantamount to siding with terrorists. The blindsiding attacks on the IFC have been vicious.

For many relatives of people lost on 9/11, the controversy over the WTC cultural institutions is one more episode in a long, often bitter dispute over how 9/11 should be remembered and understood. For ideologues eager to silence any criticism of Bush's national security doctrine, it is a golden opportunity to seize more ground. And they have a powerful arsenal: two decades of a "victims' rights" movement within the criminal justice system that has conferred a kind of moral invincibility on relatives of the murdered; relentless badgering by conservative cultural warriors that has made it easy to portray critical artists and scholars as suspect; and a right-wing media machine that can quickly quash nuance as it magnifies local disputes, Terri Schiavo–style, into a national manichean contest between patriots and traitors, adherents of moral values and downright barbarians.

The fracas erupted on June 8, when Debra Burlingame, whose brother Charles Burlingame piloted the American Airlines plane that was crashed into the Pentagon, published an op-ed in the *Wall Street Journal* predicting that "rather than a respectful tribute to our individual and collective loss," the IFC would present "a slanted history lesson...a heaping foreign policy discussion over the greater meaning of Abu Ghraib." Suggesting that the IFC's buzzwordy promises to foster critical inquiry and invite intellectual debate meant that it would serve as a platform for America-bashers, she excoriated the project's creative team, calling them "a Who's Who of the human rights, Guantánamo-obsessed world."

Burlingame played fast and loose with some facts. She didn't mention, for instance, that the people she named represented only five of the project's eighty-nine advisers and board members; she tarred Eric Foner by associating him with an infamous remark made by another Columbia University faculty member at an antiwar teach-in in 2003, even though Foner had denounced the remark at the event. Most misleading of all, perhaps, Burlingame made it seem as if the IFC would be taking the place of a memorial and 9/11 museum, not standing alongside those edifices. In no time various 9/11 family groups mobilized. By late August the website takebackthememorial.org had logged more than 43,000 signatures on a petition that followed Burlingame's twisted logic, asserting that "the International Freedom Center honors no one by making excuses for the perpetrators of this heinous crime. The memorial should be about what happened that day, about the brave heroes who risked their lives so selflessly, and about the innocent lives that were lost... nothing more."

Tossing such oil on the smoldering culture war produced predictable flare-ups. The *New York Post* imagined a "latter-day Andres Serrano" displaying "an American flag submerged in a tub of urine" or "the image of the Twin Towers covered in cow manure" at the Drawing Center, while columnist Andrea Peyser opined, "Less than four years after America was sucker-punched by terrorists, we are again under a vicious attack. Only this time, those who would destroy our way of life are working from within." Right-wing blogs burned with invective, and Burlingame—who spoke as a 9/11 family representative at the Republican National Convention last year—made the rounds of talk shows to decry the politicization of 9/11. (Burlingame's victim status granted her a special moral authority on the very programs that, at the same time, were decrying Cindy Sheehan for "exploiting" the death of her soldier son in Iraq.)

Unlike the Drawing Center, the IFC promised to accede to Governor Pataki's guidelines, vowing in a six-page July 6 letter to the LMDC that "multiple layers of internal controls" will assure that its programming will be "appropriately celebratory of our nation and its leading role in the global fight for freedom."

The cave-in didn't surprise those who worried from the beginning that the IFC had bought into Bush's Orwellian invocation of "freedom" to justify the war in Iraq and who feared it might favor chauvinistic or sentimental rhetoric over critical inquiry. "It seemed like it would trace the familiar liberal

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progression of American exceptionalism," says NYU graduate student Dawn Peterson, who lost her brother at the WTC on 9/11. But it did lead Eric Foner to resign from the advisory board. "They were unwilling to say a word in favor of freedom of expression," he says. "I didn't see how it could be successful or intellectually serious."

In June New York officials unveiled the redesigned "Freedom Tower" that will rise from the WTC site. "Somber, oppressive and clumsily conceived," in the words of *New York Times* architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff, the enormous, reinforced-glass obelisk on a twenty-story concrete pedestal is "an impregnable tower braced against the outside world" and "an ideal symbol for an empire enthralled with its own power, and unaware that it is fading." Ethereal glass facade notwithstanding, as George Pataki and other opponents of critical free expression get their way, the Snøhetta Cultural Center will carry the same message. ■

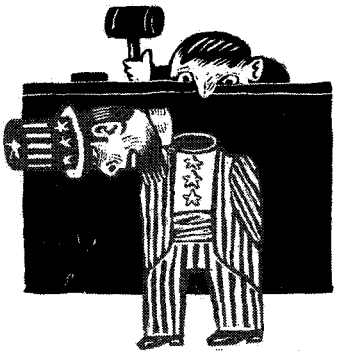
BRANDON MAYFIELD HAS EXPOSED THE DANGER OF THE LAW'S SECRET SEARCH PROVISIONS.

The Patriot Act on Trial

DAVID SARASOHN

Brandon Mayfield is the Justice Department's worst nightmare. Not because he's done anything illegal or dangerous to American security but because he hasn't.

That simple reality, now repeatedly admitted and apologized for, is likely to give both the Justice Department and the Patriot Act their most pointed courtroom challenge since the act was passed. This summer in Portland saw the first hearing on three lawsuits—featuring a media superstar lawyer, more government lawyers than could fit at the defense table, the Fourth Amendment, a claim for major damages and repeated concerns expressed by US senators—taking on the post-9/11 operations of the Justice Department.



PETER O. ZIERLEIN

The case began in March 2004 after the terrorist bombings in Madrid, when the Spanish government found a partial fingerprint in a bag containing detonators. Spanish officials sent a digital copy of the partial print to the FBI, which ran it through its 40 million fingerprints and came up with a match for Mayfield, in the system because of a teenage arrest.

Checking him out, the FBI found that Mayfield was a Muslim convert who attended the Bilal Mosque, a suburban temple also attended by some members of the Portland 7—convicted for trying to go to Afghanistan to fight with the Taliban against the United States. In fact, Mayfield, an attorney, had represented one of the Portland 7 in a child custody case. The FBI became extremely interested. But by April the Spanish were saying that the Mayfield match was "conclusively negative." The FBI then sent a team to Spain—although reportedly never asking to see the original print—which reportedly returned saying the Spanish were satisfied, although the Spanish kept saying that they weren't.

By late April the FBI picked up a rumor that the European media were about to go public with the Mayfield story, and decided to move. Telling Federal Judge Robert Jones that the fingerprint was a "100 percent match," the FBI got a warrant to arrest Mayfield as a "material witness." (This June the ACLU reported that in a sharp increase in the practice, seventy people have been detained as material witnesses since 9/11—all but one of them Muslim.) On May 6, 2004, Mayfield was taken to federal prison, where he spent the first week in lockdown.

As an attorney, he knew that the lack of actual charges against him was not reassuring. Mayfield asked his federal public defender three questions—Could he be sent to Spain? Could he be tried for the bombing? Could he be executed if convicted?—and was told that the answer to all three was yes. Except, as he kept telling people, it wasn't his fingerprint. After he'd spent two weeks in custody, when the Spanish told the FBI they had now matched the fingerprint to an Algerian, the FBI finally agreed, released Mayfield and apologized.

A month later Mayfield was telling the Portland City Club, "We need to be safe and secure in our homes, not just from the bad guys but the government as well." And he didn't even know then just how much he needed such protection.

The FBI repeatedly insisted that the problem was just a simple, unfortunate law enforcement mistake, and had absolutely nothing to do with the new powers of the Patriot Act. But Mayfield was certain that his home and office had been the object of "sneak and peek" searches. It took until March 2005—almost a full year after the FBI had arrested, released and then apologized to Mayfield—for the Justice Department to admit: "Mr. Mayfield is hereby notified that the following property was seized, altered or reproduced during [Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act] searches of his residence: three hard drives of three desktop computers and one loose hard drive were copied; several documents in the residence were digitally photographed; ten DNA samples were taken and preserved on cotton swabs and six cigarette butts were seized for DNA analysis; and approximately 335 digital photographs were taken of the residence and the property therein.... Mr. Mayfield is also hereby notified that he was the target of electronic surveillance and other physical searches authorized pursuant to FISA."

It took another two weeks for the admission—in the course of testimony by Attorney General Alberto Gonzales to the House judiciary committee—that, well, yes, the FBI had used

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the Patriot Act in the Mayfield case. Gonzales insisted, "I might add that based on what I know today—and I'm limited in what I can say because this matter is in litigation—I don't believe that the Brandon Mayfield case is an example where there was a misuse or abuse of a provision of the Patriot Act."

Senators weren't so sure. Later, Senator Russell Feingold noted that the Mayfield case "had a big effect on the whole attitude that anybody who criticized the law really wasn't concerned about terrorism." Senator Patrick Leahy, the ranking Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, argued at another committee hearing on the Patriot Act, "I'm thinking of Brandon Mayfield, the Portland attorney," against whom the FBI had no real evidence except that he "did hang out with Muslims." Conservative Republican Larry Craig seemed to evoke the Mayfield case without mentioning it when he told the committee, "I find it very difficult to believe that the federal government can enter my home, strip my hard drive, go through my records and then exit out the back door without telling me they were there."

By then Mayfield was moving on his three lawsuits against the federal government—an effort that gained momentum in June with the court-ordered release of an FBI internal memo, dated before his arrest, noting that the bureau had insufficient evidence to charge him with anything but should arrest him before the media got the story. First, he wants back everything the FBI seized in searches that the government now admits had no national security justification; the government says it needs the information for its legal defense. Second, he's seeking financial damages. Finally, he's challenging the Patriot Act clause that makes it so much easier for the government to do searches. Previously, under the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act, the only justification for a secret search was acquiring information on foreign intelligence. Under the Patriot Act that need only be part of the reason, greatly widening the areas where the Justice Department can seek—and apparently always get—a warrant for such a search.

To one of Mayfield's attorneys, Elden Rosenthal of Portland, the sneak-and-peek expansion abandons the Fourth Amendment unnecessarily. "We won World War I, we won World War II, we won the cold war without throwing out the right of Americans to be secure in their homes, without throwing out the Fourth Amendment," Rosenthal says.

On July 15 Federal Judge Ann Aiken held a preliminary hearing in Portland on government efforts to dismiss Mayfield's lawsuits. The day featured the first courtroom appearance of Mayfield's other attorney, celebrity lawyer and CNN legal commentator Gerry Spence, who charged that the FBI arrested Mayfield only because of his Muslim identity, even when there was no evidence he'd ever been to Spain or left Portland. "I am sure that had it been Billy Graham, or one of Billy Graham's children, the FBI might have said that we'd better check it out," he mused. "No airline tickets. How did he get over there to Spain? Must have been that magic carpet. The Muslim magic carpet." To Spence—looking, with his swept-back gray pompadour touching his collar, like a retired gunfighter who'd gone into corporate security—the point of the trial was clear: "Although they say, 'We're really sorry,' we haven't had an opportunity to say if sorry is enough."

Two weeks later Aiken agreed, rejecting government efforts to dismiss the lawsuits, rejecting motions to remove the FBI fingerprint experts as defendants and ordering the government to release all information about the searches and what it was holding.

With more preliminary motions, potential appeals on motions, discovery and a trial ahead, Brandon Mayfield's case against the government has years to go. But in a fairly spectacular development, the Patriot Act itself is at last on trial—although unlike Mayfield, it's not being held in lockdown. ■

LETTERS
CONTINUED

(Continued From Page 2)
choice. We can squander our power by continuing on the current path, or we can accept that the world is changing and spend our last years as the lone superpower developing structures so we can be comfortable with what will inevitably become a multipolar world. I fear we will squander everything before Americans come to their senses. MATTHEW LEVINSON

VIETNAM REVISIONISM?

Los Angeles

■ If Professor Bacevich's review ["Tug of War," July 4] accurately conveys the argument of *Perils of Dominance* by Gareth Porter, then historical revisionism of the Vietnam War is proceeding at a dizzying clip. Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon all approached the Vietnam War with the hope of achieving the second presidential term that none of them was fated to serve. As for the "odious" Robert McNamara, a veteran of corporate politics at Ford, he simply gave two different Presidents the advice they wanted to hear. The idea that an easily manipulated Lyndon Johnson was pressured into war by McNamara and McGeorge Bundy will make sense to future generations only if they know nothing about those men.

But even they may ask how it happened that Dean Rusk, a rigid anticommunist, gained in influence when Johnson succeeded Kennedy. Or why Johnson replaced Bundy as National Security Adviser with Walt Rostow, his most unyielding hawk, rather than with Bill Moyers, the man Bundy recommended for the job. Or why, when McNamara broke with Johnson over further escalation, the President chose Clark Clifford, whom he considered a staunch supporter of the war, as his next Secretary of Defense. A.J. LANGGUTH, *author*
Our Vietnam: The War 1954 to 1975

BACEVICH REPLIES

Boston

■ If I understand Professor Langguth's letter, he is insisting on the primacy of personalities in politics. Dean Rusk was a "rigid anticommunist" and Walt Rostow an "unyielding hawk," and that's all you need to know. Attach the right label to people and you can tell the story just the way you like it. Seen from this perspective, Vietnam becomes an argument over alternative versions of "the Best and the Brightest."

In *Perils of Dominance* Gareth Porter offers us a different angle of vision. He suggests that power—perceived and misperceived—rather than personalities might explain how we blundered into that war. For those willing to countenance a version of politics that looks beyond good guys and bad guys, I recommend it.

By the way, on Clark Clifford: In 1968 President Johnson was in a deep fix and was desperately looking for a way out. Johnson hired Clifford not because he was a "staunch supporter of the war" but because he was a fixer. Sometimes a single label won't suffice.
ANDREW J. BACEVICH

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COMMENT

(Continued From Page 6)

in the house." He points off east to roof-deep water.

At the far eastern edge of New Orleans, where the floodwater consumed I-10, a crew of rescuers from the state Department of Wildlife and Fisheries—biologists with boats—are getting ready to launch. They've been out here for days, bringing in water and bringing out the wounded, but as Clint Jeske explains, "A lot of people are in there just wading around, getting supplies and wading back in. They're living in half-flooded homes and they don't want to come out."

Nearby, in a sodden trailer park in the Chef Menteur Highway area, Paul Breaux sums it up thus: "I did two tours in Nam, went through the LA quake. I was a federal cop. I can deal with this. All I need is some resupply, some MREs and water." Breaux and three of his friends are camping outside their trailers; the water here had been four feet high but flowed out after a day. Why people should leave dry areas of the city is not at all clear. When pressed, some local officials say they might reconsider the order, which smacks of the incoherence and high-handedness that have characterized the whole evacuation. Refugees are loaded onto buses and just shipped away, not told where they're going or for how long. It's this sort of bad treatment that hardens people's resolve to stay.

By a levee on the west bank, school buses wait to load up. "I don't want to go far away, but I was in a boat with my disabled neighbor for five days eating nothing but potato chips and two gallons of water and some Gatorade," says a tall, skinny man named Lee from the totally submerged and oil-fouled St. Bernard Parish. "They just told us, Out," says another man, from the Algiers neighborhood, which has running water but no lights. The mayor has threatened to force people out and deny them food and water if they insist on staying.

Traditions of racism, exploitation and exclusion are visible in every aspect of this crisis. One also feels the repressive reflexes of the war on drugs and war on terror. Rather than work on rescue and cleanup with the mutual-aid networks, like the distribution efforts of Malik Rahim and his neighbor, the increasingly militarized local, state and federal agencies have defaulted to their worst bureaucratic instincts toward the dispossessed: silence, exclude, control and intimidate. Never mind why or toward what end. CHRISTIAN PARENTI

Christian Parenti writes regularly for The Nation. *Research support for this article was provided by the Investigative Fund of The Nation Institute.*

William Rehnquist

Even more than Ronald Reagan, William Rehnquist embodied the enduring preoccupations of the American right. As a young clerk to Justice Robert Jackson, he argued that the notorious separate-but-equal precedent *Plessy v. Ferguson* was "right and should be reaffirmed." As a Republican legal activist in the 1960s he challenged African-American voters at the polls. From the ashes of the Goldwater campaign Rehnquist hitched his fortunes to Richard Nixon's appeal to fear of racial integration, sexual revolution and crime, serving as a combative assistant attorney general whose labors in carving out expansive presidential power to wage war and monitor dissent still echo through the Bush Administration's legal justifications for Guantánamo and the Patriot Act.

Named Associate Justice in 1971 by Nixon, Rehnquist showed canny brilliance at translating the politics of resentment into the judicial arena. Some Justices evolve, re-evaluating the impact of their theories and decisions. But Rehnquist, appointed Chief Justice by Reagan in 1986, never betrayed doubt. He was a dissenter in *Roe v. Wade* and the all-too-brief abolition of the death penalty in the 1970s, and after 1980 he became the pivotal figure in a new antiliberal majority. In case after case he promoted a contradictory theory of federalism that is taken for granted today as synonymous with conservative judicial philosophy: On the one hand, he fought to limit the power of Congress and federal courts to enforce civil rights, desegregate schools or regulate business. Alongside that was his equally fierce commitment to policing, prisons and every element of social control, whether undercutting the *Miranda* ruling's limitations on search-and-seizure or through his dissents in abortion cases. As Chief Justice he was at the heart of the GOP takeover of all three branches of government, joining the infamous *Bush v. Gore* decision of 2000.

Rehnquist's death during the New Orleans catastrophe caught the Administration at a vulnerable moment. Bush's decision to elevate the nomination of John Roberts—leaving retiring Justice O'Connor in her seat for now—rests on the presumption that his nomination is secure. Roberts, as we have argued in these pages, is Rehnquist's ideological heir: His consistent favoring of presidential power and his restrictive vision of the federal judiciary's role in civil rights and environmental law reflect his old boss's agenda. But that doesn't guarantee his confirmation. To the contrary; the authority of the Chief Justice to assign opinions and manage Court traffic gives ample reason to revisit presumably closed questions and to review his Solicitor General records. The prospect of Roberts as Chief Justice ought to force consideration of his unethical role in the Hamdan Guantánamo case and his secret job interviews with the White House while hearing that case.

Bush hopes Roberts will carry forward Rehnquist's counterrevolution. But for all his brilliance, Roberts—a flame-throwing appellate litigator, not a consensus-builder—lacks Rehnquist's years of experience on the bench. Like the right generally, today's Court conservatives are fragmented; they disagree on abortion, the death penalty, international law and other issues. It's doubtful Roberts can succeed where even his mentor finally failed to hold the coalition together.

Rehnquist showed little regard for the social consequences of his relentless application of conservative legal theory. The legacy of segregation, "states' rights" and "limited government" is visible in the ranks of the dead and homeless from Hurricane Katrina. To look back is to look forward with clear eyes. But like his mentor Rehnquist, Roberts pledged himself to the conservative faith as a young man, and he has never looked back. BRUCE SHAPIRO

Bruce Shapiro was director of The Nation Institute's Supreme Court Watch during the nominations of Justices Thomas, Breyer and Ginsburg.

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BOOKS & THE ARTS

Desert Storm

MILTON VIORST

HOUSE OF BUSH, HOUSE OF SAUD.
By Craig Unger.
Scribner. 356 pp. $26.

INSIDE THE MIRAGE: America's Fragile Partnership With Saudi Arabia.
By Thomas W. Lippman.
Westview. 396 pp. $17.50.

SAUDI ARABIA EXPOSED: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis.
By John R. Bradley.
Palgrave. 224 pp. $22.95.

Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's triumphant return to Tehran in February 1979, the last act in the dramatic overthrow of the Shah of Iran, presented Washington with a major policy quandary. Until the 1960s, the United States had relied on British imperial forces to safeguard the West's crucial oil interests in the region. Its own Gulf flotilla—based at a modest facility in Bahrain—did little more than show the flag. As long as the cold war lasted, the superpowers, wary of provoking each other, had by tacit agreement stayed clear of each other. But the Shah was the chief US client and military surrogate, and when Khomeini took his place, he neutralized America's defensive capacity in the Gulf.

Saudi Arabia was the logical fallback. US involvement with the Saudis dated back to World War II, when President Roosevelt declared the kingdom strategically important, thus eligible for lend-lease. In 1945 Roosevelt held a celebrated shipboard meeting with the Saudi king, Abdul Aziz, which came to symbolize the bond between the countries. Oil was Roosevelt's chief interest, of course, but military strategy also played a role. Late in the war, the United States built an airfield at Dhahran in eastern Saudi Arabia, which emerged in subsequent years as a base that permitted US planes to reach deep into Soviet Asia.

After World War II, President Truman went a step further by certifying the kingdom's eligibility for military training and equipment. As petrodollars poured in, the Saudis deposited tens of billions, through purchases and investments, into the coffers of American industry. In the 1950s, when Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser was cozying up to Moscow and was sweeping through the region, the Saudi government stood as a bulwark at America's side. The Sauds' hostility to Nasser was in part a product of inter-Arab rivalry. No less important, it derived from the royal family's religious beliefs, impregnated with a deep aversion to the atheism at the core of Soviet Communism.

But like their social system, the Saudis' religion—the puritanical Wahhabi version of Islam—made America uncomfortable. Unaccountable to their subjects, the Sauds, tribal despots, spent lavish sums not just on themselves but on mosques and madrassahs across the Muslim world, promoting the anti-Westernism that was inherent in their faith. Their missionary efforts did not save them from widespread criticism from their own subjects for ties with the Western heathens. But the United States, obsessed with communism's threat, chose to overlook the possibility that Wahhabism might itself be dangerous. Even after Iran exploded, introducing America to the perils of Islamic extremism, the United States professed to see little in common between Khomeini's anti-Western values and the Saudis'.

On September 11, the United States woke up to a threat it had overlooked during the cold war: that of Saudi-bred radical Islam.

The lesson intruded brutally in November 1979, during Islam's annual hajj, when some 250 heavily armed Islamic warriors seized the Great Mosque in Mecca and took thousands of pilgrims hostage. The attackers were Sunni fanatics with no

Milton Viorst, who has covered the Middle East as a journalist for more than three decades, is the author of six books on the subject. His latest, to be published by Random House next year, is Storm From the East: The Arab World in the Twentieth Century.

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obvious link to Shiite Iran, but they were clearly inspired by Khomeini. They denounced the royal family's lack of Islamic rigor, its ties to America, its extravagance. After weeks of combat, producing heavy carnage, the Sauds emerged victorious, ending the struggle with a flourish by beheading sixty-three rebels. The United States, which had long expected democratic reform in Saudi Arabia, was shocked at a popular uprising based on anti-Western jihad. But the monarchy's reaction to the challenge was to push back all promise of democratic reform and to embrace an even more conspicuous Islamic piety.

Still, strategically Washington saw no choice but to support the only candidate available to fill the Shah's shoes. It was not that the Sauds had much military potential, despite their acquisition of huge stocks of weapons. In Riyadh a few years ago, I asked Prince Saud al-Faisal, the foreign minister, why the country's armed forces were, despite a rough equivalence in population, so much weaker than Israel's. He bristled at the comparison, muttering, "Building an army takes time.... We have to develop our human resources." But Saudi officials, when pressed, admitted that the royal family had no appetite, especially after the Mecca insurgency, for developing a standing army that might wind up one day turning against it. It preferred relying on the United States for its security. Given the oil involved, Washington accepted the arrangement, and during the 1980s its relationship with Saudi Arabia's royalty grew more intimate, more paternal.

Then in 1990, after months of turbulence, the Soviet Union collapsed, ending the cold war. Its demise upset longstanding strategic calculations. As the surviving superpower, the United States no longer had to factor Soviet power into its decisions—not in the Persian Gulf, not anywhere. It acquired a free hand in protecting, or advancing, its interests, oil and otherwise. It no longer needed a surrogate. It could do what it wanted on its own.

As the decade opened, Saddam Hussein was the only dissenter to US pre-eminence in the Gulf. The Reagan Administration had supported Iraq—with a conspicuous lapse in the Iran/*contra* fiasco—during its eight-year war against Khomeini. But the fit between the United States and Iraq had never been good, and after Saddam's victory in 1988 neither made much effort to preserve the friendly ties it had cultivated. Saddam's propaganda emphasized a heritage going back to ancient Babylon, conveying a dream of personal leadership of a new Arab empire. His success at stopping Khomeini's ambitions had swelled his sense of himself and his power. At a minimum he wanted to be recognized as the dominant leader in the Gulf, a notion that was starkly at odds with Washington's. The next two years were marked by rising tension between the two countries.

Saddam flexed his muscles in 1990, a bad time to provoke a dispute over Kuwait. The subject was Iraq's war debt, which, he argued plausibly, Kuwait should forgive, in whole or in part, in consideration of the blood Iraqis had spilled in its defense. But Kuwait—at US instigation, some Middle East officials insist—did not yield. To Washington, Kuwait was vital in its emerging Gulf security system, a buffer against aggression by either Iraq or Iran on the Saudi oilfields. The United States had pledged to protect Kuwait during the Iran-Iraq war but left its postwar position unclear. When it took no public stand in the debt quarrel, Saddam concluded the United States was indifferent. Persuaded he could invade with impunity, he stumbled into disaster.

After Saddam's 1990 invasion, bin Laden offered the Saudis an army of holy warriors to liberate Kuwait—the royal family declined.

Saddam's army seized Kuwait on August 1, 1990, which placed it in position to advance into Saudi Arabia. Intelligence in US hands left serious doubt about whether this was his intention, but the war hawks in Washington led by then–Defense Secretary Dick Cheney pressed for action, and the royal family was not disposed to gamble with its fate. In the tit-for-tat of the US-Saudi alliance, the monarchy invited the first President Bush to use its soil as a staging ground to liberate Kuwait. The Sauds seemed unable to perceive that in doing so they might be igniting a force more powerful than Saddam Hussein.

To counter Saddam, President Bush organized a powerful coalition consisting not just of Western but also Arab states stunned by Saddam's transgression of Arab sovereignty. The strong international response to the aggression contrasted starkly with the feeble response a decade later to the second President Bush's plan to launch a war on Iraq. Saddam's worn anti-Western and anti-Zionist slogans fell flat in 1990, and the Arabs who urged restraint were shouted down. Few observers even noticed that Osama bin Laden, a Wahhabi who had helped defeat the Soviets in Afghanistan in the 1980s, offered the Saudi monarchy an army of 100,000 holy warriors to liberate Kuwait, on the condition that the Sauds agreed to keep out infidel troops. The royal family declined the offer.

The Bush coalition's victory simply reaffirmed the Saudi monarchy's dependence on US control of the Gulf. At the same time, the coalition's use of Saudi bases to invade Iraq, as well as its decision to retain them after Saddam's defeat, inflamed many Saudis and provided bin Laden with justification for jihad against both America and his homeland.

Two years after Bush's victory, bin Laden's agents, organized as Al Qaeda, exploded a bomb beneath New York's World Trade Center in what was later recognized as a test run. In the succeeding years, Al Qaeda spread its offensive in a range of attacks. It took nineteen American lives in a bombing of Dhahran in 1996, caused serious losses in assaults on US embassies in Africa in 1998 and finally hijacked four airliners on September 11, 2001, crashing two of them into New York's Twin Towers, a third into the Pentagon and a fourth into a field in Pennsylvania. Of the nineteen hijackers on board, fifteen were Saudi, and in attacks since then, Saudis—though surely not Saudis alone—have been deeply involved. The Pentagon has admitted the presence of at least 120 Saudis at Guantánamo. It took two more years of denial before the royal family acknowledged that the kingdom itself was in jeopardy from bin Laden.

Numerous writers—American and European, journalists and academics—have tried to make sense of these attacks. Under public pressure President Bush himself, though disdainful of knowledge that is not politically useful, appointed the bipartisan 9/11 commission to make a study. Much of the research has positioned the attacks within the context of the American-Saudi relationship, in recognition of its ambivalent, mutually harmful and beneficial, nature. Most works ask whether the benefits outweigh the costs for the United States. The body of literature that has emerged, whatever the instances of partisanship or xenophobia, has produced a substantial increase in popular knowledge, though it is not nearly as much as the public needs.

In *House of Bush, House of Saud*, journalist Craig Unger outlines a conspiracy theory worthy of the culture of the Middle East. But, as a prominent Iraqi once said to me, "just because we Arabs are addicted to conspiracy theories doesn't mean we are always wrong." As

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an example Unger sketches some rather shady ties between George W. Bush's Harken Energy, the source of his oil wealth, and BCCI, the Saudi-dominated bank that triggered a major scandal in the 1990s, when the first Bush was President. His account contains more information than the public ever received from the Justice Department or the press. If Unger's material, delivered with the breathlessness of a TV reporter, often seems off the charts, that does not mean it is without truth.

Unger argues that 9/11 must be understood within the context of the ties between the Bush and Saud families. "These two dynasties," he writes, "had a history dating back more than twenty years. Not just business partners and personal friends, the Bushes and the Saudis had pulled off elaborate covert operations and gone to war together. They had shared secrets that involved unimaginable personal wealth, spectacular military might, the richest energy resources in the world, and the most odious crimes imaginable.... Horrifying as it sounds, the secret relationship between these two great families helped to trigger the Age of Terror and give rise to the tragedy of 9/11."

With indignation, Unger links items of circumstantial evidence to conclude that immediately after 9/11, the second President Bush acceded to a Saudi request to repatriate planeloads of Saud and bin Laden family members without interrogation by US authorities. That such planes flew to Saudi Arabia is not in dispute. But the 9/11 commission asserts that the flights were authorized at an administrative level and "we found no evidence of political intervention." It adds that "our own independent review of the Saudi nationals involved confirms that no one with *known* [my italics] links to terrorism" was aboard. One must ask why such a momentous decision was reached by mere functionaries, if it was. The commission's own words, if carefully examined, convey skepticism about the claims of Bush Administration officials.

The Bushes, no doubt, brought to government a commitment to the creed of the oil industry, which has weighed heavily in their Middle East thinking, but this is not the same as a conspiracy. The huge Saudi military expenditures began after the Shah's fall, when Reagan was President. Only the Israelis—convinced that Arabs are by nature more dangerous than Iranians, with whom they had a productive relationship before Khomeini—raised a significant protest. Unger has good reason to lament the absence of strategic debate among Americans. But Reagan did not need a Bush to convince him that Saudi help was required for the Gulf's defense.

Thomas W. Lippman, in *Inside the Mirage: America's Fragile Partnership With Saudi Arabia*, approaches the problem differently. For a longtime journalist in the Middle East, he is surprisingly thin on politics. Instead, he goes back to the early days, when the first oil producers arrived on Saudi soil, and takes a friendly walk down memory lane to tell us about the seed time of the American-Saudi relationship.

By the time hundreds of thousands of Western soldiers landed to save the kingdom from Saddam, Saudis were feeling surly.

It opened with CASOC, soon to be called Aramco, which began delivering oil in 1938. Lippman writes, with seeming naïveté, "Even Aramco's critics acknowledge that the company labored mightily to improve the living standards and health of the Arabs, to educate them and to impart the technical skills they would need to advance in their new careers as oil workers. The Arabs learned to operate and repair equipment they had never heard of a few years before. They learned to read, to drive, to use slide rules, to agitate the water in their canisters so that mosquitoes would not settle and breed. Aramco taught them to wear Western-style clothing and boots so they could work safely, their robes no longer prey to fast moving machinery and their toes no longer exposed."

Only as an afterthought does he tell us that in time Aramco grew complacent about its relations with the Saudis. "It assumed they were happy," he says, "because Aramco thought it was treating them well." But "the Arabs wanted something less easy to deliver than trucks and generators: They wanted respect."

Even Washington, not often so vigilant, recognized all was not in order. In 1951 a State Department memo proposed to "encourage Aramco to pursue progressive and enlightened policies in connection with wages, housing for Arab employees, training and education." Notwithstanding this urging, the Saudi work force remained concentrated in the ranks of the unskilled and, "by 1953, when Arab nationalism inspired by the republican revolution in Egypt [Nasserism] was stirring anti-foreign sentiment throughout the Arab world," 95 percent of Aramco's 13,555 Saudi employees were still in the lowest pay grades.

In a little-known incident, Aramco's Saudi workers went on strike for higher wages and better housing in 1953. The monarchy was stunned by their presumption. When a workers' delegation brought its case before the government authorities, they were arrested, and when the strike spread to the airbase at Dhahran, the state sent in troops and forced the workers to return to their jobs. The royal family left no doubt whom it favored in the contest. Even when it nationalized Aramco twenty years later, its objective was to raise its own income, not provide a better life for its citizens. Though Lippman draws no conclusions of his own, he reveals much about the rising bitterness among the population toward the monarchy, which surely tells us something about why bin Laden found Saudis so easy to recruit.

Consistently, US officials expressed their apprehension over America's role in aggravating the alienation between Saudis and their rulers, particularly as rising nationalism began threatening US interests. Lippman quotes a warning contained in another State Department memo, this one dated 1961: "The very presence of United States military personnel in Saudi Arabia... disturb[s] Saudi and Arab nationalists."

This memo circulated in an era when Arab nationalists were secular. Arab nationalism intensified in the 1980s, when it started to overlap with religious extremism. By the time hundreds of thousands of Western soldiers landed to save their country from Saddam, Saudis were feeling surly. To avoid offense, the US command set rules for its troops—no alcohol, no female entertainers or lewd magazines, no T-shirts on female soldiers, no open worship by Christians or Jews. But the extremists were implacable: The very troops that assured the royal family's rule were also subverting it. Even though the United States agreed to withdraw most of its forces, extremist attacks on the monarchy continued.

John Bradley's *Saudi Arabia Exposed: Inside a Kingdom in Crisis* deals with these attacks with unusual insight. An Arabic-speaking ex-editor of the English-language *Arab News*, he uses a graceful journalist's pen to write with scholarly authority. He lived for several years in Jeddah, in the Hejaz, a sector of the peninsula that has resisted Wahhabi puritanism since the Sauds conquered it nearly a century ago. Bradley's work shows a sensitivity rare for a Westerner, reaching directly to the society's core.

Bradley recognizes, for example, the

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dangers to social stability of the 60 percent of Saudis who are under 21. Poorly educated, living at home where they are coddled by parents and foreign servants, without qualifications for administrative jobs but refusing manual work, they are utterly directionless. All contacts with the other sex are forbidden. These youth spread their discontent over the Internet, but otherwise boredom hangs over them "like a toxic cloud." Crime among the young and jobless has risen nearly fivefold since 1990. Their life, Bradley says, promotes feelings of inferiority and inadequacy, leading "some to wantonness and others to the straight and narrow of fundamentalism."

Bradley also writes shrewdly of Saudi Arabia's Shiites, a substantial minority nationally but a majority in the oil-rich Eastern Province. The government, pressed by its Wahhabi constituency, has always treated them as infidels, forcing them to conduct their religious observances in secret. Historically the Shiites have been passive, but since the Shiite victory under Khomeini in Iran, and more recently since the rise to power of Iraq's Shiite community, they have become more assertive, arousing in the monarchy a fear that they might be developing a power base in the oil region. Whenever the monarchy has made some effort to appease them, it has provoked the ire of the Wahhabi establishment. Squeezed by the two sides, it is being undermined by both.

Whatever his other strengths, Bradley is at his most impressive in dealing with the subtle political ramifications of Saudi Arabia's tribal system, about which Westerners know almost nothing. He reminds us that more than once in the past century or so, the Sauds have had to face tribal uprisings, which they suppressed brutally, and that tribal rivalry is far from over. As a sign of growing awareness by US diplomats, he tells us, a Saudi who applies for a visa must now provide a tribal affiliation, but Bradley is skeptical about whether American officials can tell the difference between friendly tribes and hostile ones.

To me, the book's most significant revelation is that most of the fifteen Saudis who hijacked planes on 9/11 were not Wahhabis at all but rather tribesmen from the southern province of Asir. Like Hejazis and Shiites, he writes, Asiris "have always been reluctant partners in the Saudi state." Interestingly, Asiri women, unique among Saudis, are allowed to drive cars, but Bradley warns that this freedom does not suggest a pro-Western tilt. On the contrary, bin Laden, who knows Asir well, found eager recruits on personal missions there. What he and the Asiris shared was contempt for the monarchy's high life, and so the two had common cause to inflict injury on the Sauds and their protector. Such observations lead Bradley to conclude that 9/11, far from being the product of recent events, was inevitable from the start of the American-Saudi alliance that was born six decades ago.

All of these books appeared, of course, before the accession to the throne of Prince Abdullah, who had been exercising executive authority in the kingdom since a stroke incapacitated King Fahd, his half-brother, in 1995. Saudi opinion seems to hold that Abdullah's accession will change little, largely because he, though perhaps a shade more reformist, remains subject to the consensus of the circle of senior members of the royal family. More mysterious was the abrupt replacement a few weeks earlier of Prince Bandar, ambassador to Washington for the past twenty-two years, by Prince Turki al-Faisal, an ex-head of Saudi intelligence. Some observers expressed disquiet over the change on the grounds that the new envoy recruited mujahedeen and maintained contacts with bin Laden during the war in Afghanistan against the Soviet Union. But so did the CIA. At best, it is likely to take a while before a new pattern emerges in the US-Saudi relationship.

That is precisely why this might be a good time for the Bush Administration to step up its reading on Saudi Arabia, including these books. Unfortunately, this Administration takes pride in not reading books or learning lessons from the past. In response to critics who warned that in invading Iraq the United States was failing to take reality into account, the Administration answered that it made its own reality. The consequences in Iraq have been catastrophic, and as long as the Administration ignores the reality of Saudi fragility, it not only risks losing a vital ally but undermines its own prospects for defeating global terrorism. To be sure, no power on earth is strong enough at this point to dislodge the United States from the Persian Gulf, or deprive it of the oil it consumes so greedily. But the Administration's persistent dismissal of Middle East reality will surely doom us to more physical destruction and the loss of more American lives—maybe even worse. ■

White Man's Burden

ANDREW J. BACEVICH

IMPERIAL GRUNTS: The American Military on the Ground.
By Robert Kaplan. Random House. 421 pp. $27.95.

To a degree that other mere scribblers can only envy, Robert Kaplan is a writer whose views command attention among movers and shakers. For Clinton-era officials grappling with the crisis of a disintegrating Yugoslavia, Kaplan's *Balkan Ghosts*, published in 1993, served for a time as holy writ. The essays collected in *The Coming Anarchy*, released in 2001, offered a bleak but influential depiction of the disorder roiling the planet after the cold war. Restlessly trolling the world for stories, Kaplan has become much more than a reporter; he is a public intellectual who happens to live out of his rucksack.

With his new book, Kaplan turns from describing the world's ills to proposing a remedy. The antidote to anarchy is empire, policed by American soldiers holding an assault rifle in one hand and offering candy bars with the other.

Kaplan began *Imperial Grunts* intending to "take a snapshot for posterity," recording what it was like to be a GI "stationed at remote locations overseas at the beginning of the twenty-first century." The result, however, is less a snapshot than an album of impressions collected during the course of travels that take Kaplan from the jungles of Colombia to the deserts of Iraq, with forays in between to the Philippines, Yemen, Djibouti and Mongolia. At each stop along the way his subject is the American soldier, whom he observes, interviews, explains and venerates.

A journalist who displays his contempt for phonies and frauds like a badge of honor, Kaplan wants above all for his readers to accept his snapshot as genuine and truthful. He prides himself on report-

Andrew J. Bacevich is professor of international relations at Boston University. His most recent book is The New American Militarism: How Americans Are Seduced by War *(Oxford).*

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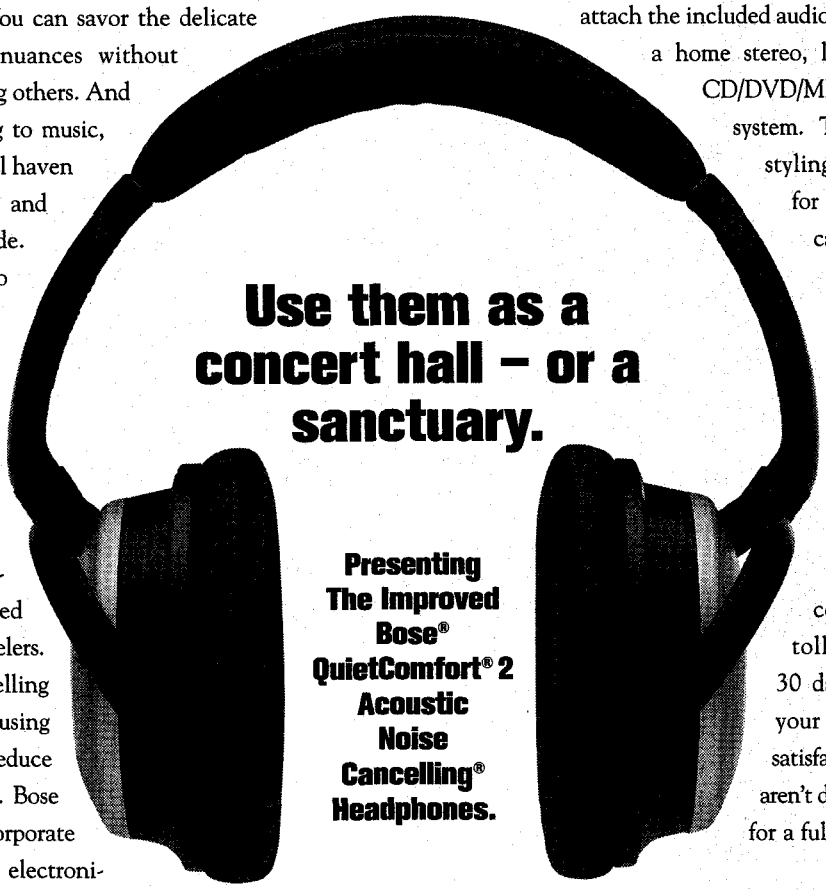

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ing that is immediate, personal and even intimate. In this case, tracking US troops across various hot spots obliged Kaplan to endure any number of indignities, all of them carefully enumerated: He subsisted on combat rations, went without showers, jostled around in drafty cargo planes and cramped Humvees and slept on dirt floors using a helmet for a pillow. So this purports to be the real deal.

Among the effusive endorsements adorning *Imperial Grunts* is one by Bing West describing Kaplan as "America's Kipling." Like Kipling, Kaplan is smitten with barracks rooms, mess halls and the "world of beer, cigarettes, instant coffee, and chewing tobaccos" that soldiers ostensibly inhabit. In a nation crowded with charlatans, soldiers—"people who hunted, drove pickups, employed profanities as a matter of dialect, and yet had a literal, demonstrable belief in the Almighty"—retain for Kaplan an authenticity otherwise fast disappearing from American life.

Authenticity in this context connotes masculinity and self-abnegation. In an age redolent of sham and corruption, soldiers—having "taken a veritable monastic vow of poverty"—retain an "unapologetic, literal belief in God...tempered and uplifted by the democratic experience." As a consequence, they are compassionate as well as brave, rough around the edges but also refreshingly honest.

If Kaplan is a romantic, he is also a populist and a reactionary. He dotes over the career sergeants who come out of rural America and the "generic working class," in Kaplan's eyes "the Great Preserver of the oldest, simplest virtues." He endorses the muscular Protestant fundamentalism that over the past thirty years has tacitly established itself as the quasi-official religion of America's armed forces, its abiding theme not love thy neighbor but smite thine enemy. He notes approvingly that in today's military the spirit of the Old South lives on, with the very best captains and majors finding their role models in "the gleaming officer corps of the Confederacy." Indeed, Kaplan locates the "true religious soul" of present-day professional soldiers in "the martial evangelicalism of the South."

Reactionary populists idealize the past because they loathe the present. Kaplan proves no exception. Fawning over soldiers as a virtuous remnant of a lost, better age, he misses no opportunity to express his contempt for his contemporaries who do not share in the austere existence of the classic man-at-arms. The targets of his wrath include, but are by no means limited to, narcissistic intellectuals, risk-averse politicians, micromanaging generals, bean-counting bureaucrats, wimpy journalists who have never visited Djibouti or Mongolia, the entire "policy nomenklatura in Washington and New York—in its cocoon of fine restaurants and theoretical discussions," and all manner of effete civilians, especially those residing in New England, which Kaplan, who makes his home in Massachusetts, describes as awash with pacifists.

Why are such people worth defending? How is it that a warped and decadent society manages to produce such sturdy warriors? Hovering in the background of his snapshot, these questions do not interest Kaplan. He prefers to focus on the American soldier in the field, where the order of the day has less to do with defending the country per se than with managing a global empire.

On that empire Kaplan is bullish. He views the global war on terror as an opportunity to push out its boundaries—if the policy-making twits in Washington will simply give dirty-boots soldiers the latitude to do so. "To be an American in the first decade of the twenty-first century," he writes, "was to be present at a grand and fleeting moment." The events of September 11, 2001, inaugurated what Kaplan calls America's "Second Expeditionary Era"—the first had begun with the expansionist surge of 1898—in which US forces once again sally forth to take up "the white man's burden," a phrase that he employs without irony or apology.

Kaplan laces his narrative with ostentatious references to emperors and adventurers, proconsuls and viceroys, ranging from T.E. Lawrence to "Ligustinus, the Roman centurion." The cumulative effect is to suggest that the United States today is simply doing what empires throughout history have done: shouldering "the righteous responsibility to advance the boundaries of free society and good government into zones of sheer chaos." To imply that other, less exalted considerations just might enter into the equation—power? profit?—becomes unseemly. For Kaplan, the essence of empire is helping those unable to help themselves, creating order out of anarchy and uplifting the downtrodden.

In this sense, as Kaplan sees it, 9/11 returned the US military to its nineteenth-century roots when advancing the boundaries of free society meant removing any obstacles impeding the westward march of the young Republic. Today's war on terror is "really about taming the frontier,"

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with the frontier now literally without limits. According to Kaplan, the vast swath of Islam, stretching from Africa across the Middle East to Southeast Asia, now qualifies as "Injun Country." The "entire planet" has now become "battle space for the American military."

Buried in all of this chest-thumping jingoism and celebration of soldierly virtue is an argument of sorts. The essence of the argument is as follows: America's unconventional warriors hold the key to governing its global imperium. On the outer rim of empire, cultural sensitivity and familiarity with the local languages matter more than firepower. The efforts of the guy on the ground sipping tea with the local warlord count for more than airy pronouncements issued by the Pentagon or the White House. Quality outweighs quantity. Rather than the large, fixed installations favored by what Kaplan contemptuously refers to as the "Big Army," better to establish a small, austere footprint. Only the US military has the ability to run the American empire, but "the fewer troops that policed it the better."

According to Kaplan, the world's sole superpower doesn't especially need tanks and fighter-bombers, artifacts from a military age now past. Instead, it ought to be investing in something akin to a "Peace Corps with guns." During the course of his travels, he discovers that the nation already has this capability in its Special Forces and Marine Corps—elite organizations optimized for imperial policing. All that's required is to turn them loose and to get out of the way. After all, as Kaplan explains in an assertion sure to come as news to the Air Force and the Northern Alliance, a mere handful of special operations troops "conquered Afghanistan by themselves."

Kaplan's reporting, however, belies his thesis, both as to the imperial past and the military imperatives of the present. Two examples will suffice to make the point.

Kaplan's chapter on the Philippines details his stay in Zamboanga, where Filipino authorities have been engaged in a never-ending struggle against the Moro Islamic Liberation Front. After 9/11 Washington classified the Moros as part of the global terrorist conspiracy and dispatched a contingent of military advisers to assist the Filipino army. For the Pentagon the southern Philippines became, in Kaplan's words, "a laboratory for drying up an Islamic insurgency, as well as for small-scale nation-building."

This is not, to put it mildly, the first time that American soldiers have undertaken such an enterprise. For well over a decade during the "First Expeditionary Era," Zamboanga had been the headquarters for khaki-clad Americans tasked with pacifying what was then called the Moro Province. US Army forces, under a succession of famous commanders such as Leonard Wood, Tasker Bliss and John Pershing, employed the "Peace Corps with guns" approach, combining naked coercion with ambitious programs of political reform, social engineering and economic development. Although the phrase "humanitarian intervention" had yet to be invented, the American officers sent to deal with the Moros had no doubt that their own intentions were humane and high-minded.

The effort yielded a meager harvest. Although the Americans killed plenty of Moros, including notoriously large numbers of women and children, resistance to US rule proved to be inextinguishable. Imaginative and energetically implemented nation-building programs had a negligible impact. Several decades of colonial tutelage produced a present-day Philippine nation that Kaplan himself describes

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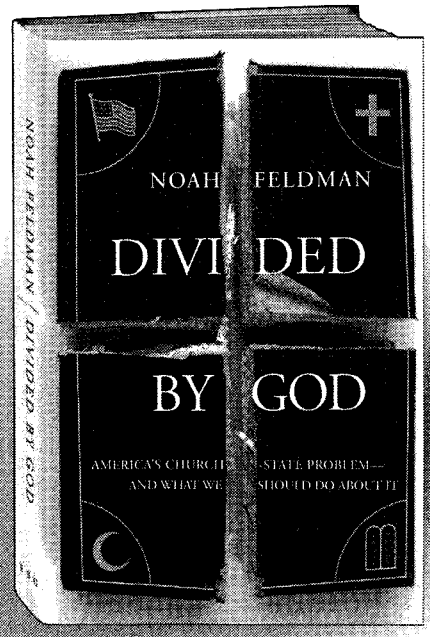

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as "dysfunctional, intractable, and poverty-stricken," not to mention "pathetically corrupt." Indeed, Kaplan observes—correctly—that "from 1902 to 1913, America's attempt to impose democracy had led to a more militant Islam." Why will present-day attempts to dry up this perpetual insurgency yield a different result? He does not say.

Kaplan conceived of his visit to Iraq as an opportunity to witness US Marines, tapping their rich history in "small wars," winning Iraqi hearts and minds. But unforeseen events intervened. When insurgents murdered four American contractors in Falluja on March 31, 2004, priorities changed: Cultural sensitivity suddenly mattered less than brute force. Battering Falluja into submission saw Marines resorting to the "Big Army" methods that Kaplan had earlier disdained, complete with tanks, fighter-bombers and an abundance of firepower. The assault on Falluja was the "classic, immemorial labor of infantry" reminiscent of Vietnam and World War II. It wasn't tea with warlords; it was a bloodbath.

On whether the effort advanced the boundaries of free society and good governance, Kaplan remains silent. But certainly the successive battles for Falluja—indeed, the mess that is present-day Iraq—calls into question Kaplan's contention that scattering Special Forces teams hither and yon will enable the United States to bring the Injuns to heel. There will always be recalcitrants willing and determined to fight.

Kaplan introduces *Imperial Grunts* with this typically bold assertion: "By the turn of the twenty-first century, the United States military had already appropriated the entire earth, and was ready to flood the most obscure areas of it with troops at a moment's notice." Whether such an assessment of US military power was ever accurate is doubtful. By 2005, however, it had become demonstrably false. Hard-pressed to hold on to the new provinces to which today's architects of empire have laid claim, America's armed forces are in no position to appropriate more. As for the Pentagon's ability to flood additional obscure quarters of the earth, the troops required to do so simply do not exist.

The real story of the present-day US military, which the peripatetic Kaplan somehow has managed to overlook, is one of power squandered—lives lost, dollars wasted, a glittering reputation sullied. It's enough to suggest that a militarized empire might not be such a great idea after all. ■

Colonial Encounters

LAILA LALAMI

DESERTION. By Abdulrazak Gurnah. Pantheon. 262 pp. $23.

The archipelago of Zanzibar was, at various times in its history, under the rule of Persians from Shiraz, Arabs from Oman and Europeans from Portugal and Britain. The islands' location in the Indian Ocean, along major trade routes between Africa and Asia, made them a particularly enviable prize for conquerors. With few exceptions, the settlers tended to mix with the locals until the next wave of colonizers displaced them, resulting in a merging of languages and customs that makes the country one of those places for which the term "confluence of cultures" seems to have been invented. Abdulrazak Gurnah, one of Africa's most celebrated novelists and a native of Zanzibar, has mined his homeland's rich history in several of his books, and he returns to it with *Desertion*, a novel about—what else?—colonialism and miscegenation.

Now a professor of English and postcolonial literature at the University of Kent, Gurnah left Zanzibar in 1968, a few short years after the country gained independence. He chose to stay in Britain, like many other educated people of his generation. This exodus has been the focus of much of his work; all of his previous novels feature a man displaced from Zanzibar to England for political or personal reasons, an immigrant who retains ambivalent feelings about both his homeland and his adopted country. "I know I came to writing in England, in estrangement," Gurnah wrote in the *Guardian* last year, "and I realise now that it is this condition of being from one place and living in another that has been my subject over the years, not as a unique experience which I have undergone, but as one of the stories of our times." In this, his seventh novel, Gurnah revisits the theme of exile and expands it to relationships—between lovers, between families, between countries.

Desertion opens in 1899, when Hassanali, a middle-aged shopkeeper of mixed Indian and African descent, leaves his house to open the local mosque for the dawn prayer and stumbles on a fallen European, a man so exhausted that he only manages to groan when asked to identify himself. The stranger turns out to be Martin Pearce, an Arabic-speaking British historian who took part in a hunting trip but found the slaughter of animals so unbearable that he left off with his Somali guides, who later abandoned him in the wilderness. He's thirsty, hungry and barely conscious when Hassanali takes him home to his wife and sister to care for him. Before Pearce is restored to full health, however, in comes a British government official, Frederick Turner, to whisk him away lest the natives do him any harm. Later, when Pearce finds out about the mistreatment of his native hosts, he goes back and apologizes, and it is then that he meets Hassanali's older sister, the formidable Rehana, with whom he falls in love.

Written in the third person, the narrative lets us in successively on the inner lives of Hassanali, Turner, Rehana and Pearce, dipping into their pasts to reveal personal histories and psychological detail. We learn, for instance, that Hassanali is an unassuming man who lives in fear that his wife will grow to disdain his timidity, that Turner fancies himself a scholar of poetry and loves to quote Shelley and Rimbaud, that Rehana has grown bitter and resentful since her merchant husband abandoned her a few years earlier, that Pearce is a reflective man who is too polite to push his opinions on others. Gurnah writes beautifully and perceptively, adopting different tones for each of his characters, and lacing their stories with bits of wit and humor. For instance, Hassanali calls in a bonesetter to attend to Pearce, being careful to address the healer by his first name, for "no one called him Legbreaker to his face unless he could run very fast or did not fear an accidental fracture."

When Pearce meets Rehana, he is struck by the "anguishing beauty of her eyes and the delicate movements of her face." The attraction is mutual. They seem to be on the verge of a highly illicit affair, one made all the more improbable by their

Laila Lalami's first novel, Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits, *will be published in October by Algonquin. She lives in Portland, where she edits the cultural webzine* Moorishgirl.com.

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starkly different backgrounds and by the social constraints imposed on women in a Muslim society at the turn of the century. But after hinting at these narrative possibilities, Gurnah brings this portion of the novel to an abrupt end. The reader is robbed of the opportunity to witness the affair through the eyes of the protagonists, and a first-person narrator leaps in to discuss the implausibility of the relationship and speculate on how it could have happened:

> I don't know how it would have happened. The unlikeliness of it defeats me.... This was 1899, not the age of Pocahontas when a romantic fling with a savage princess could be described as an adventure.... Martin Pearce was not a naïve young sailor from a rural backwater or a swaggering urchin emboldened by imperial pride, who was overwhelmed by the strangeness of his surroundings or was touched into impetuousness by the beauty of an exotic jewel or a muscular amazon. What would have made an Englishman of his background—university, colonial official, a scholar—begin something like that with the sister of a shopkeeper in a small town on the East African coast?

This is not just a rhetorical question. One would indeed like to know how these two managed to carry on a relationship, but Gurnah appears to be more interested in the effect of the affair on succeeding generations than in the affair itself. The plot jumps forward in time to the 1950s, the years immediately preceding independence. Returning to the third-person narrative, Gurnah introduces us to a modern Zanzibari family whose three children, Amin, Farida and Rashid, are invested by their parents with all the hopes a young nation might have for its future. The family appears to have no relation to the characters we have met before, and we must wait until this second story unfolds in order to know what happened to Rehana and Pearce, and how the two narrative threads connect.

Along the way, Gurnah explores the imperial takeover of Zanzibar by the British. Frederick Turner, for instance, is an unabashed colonialist who thinks that the British Empire is not only good for Africa but also different from other empires before it, because it is "moral." After all, he argues, the British outlawed slavery and developed the land, and so have the mission of governing Africans, who are so clearly incapable of doing so on their

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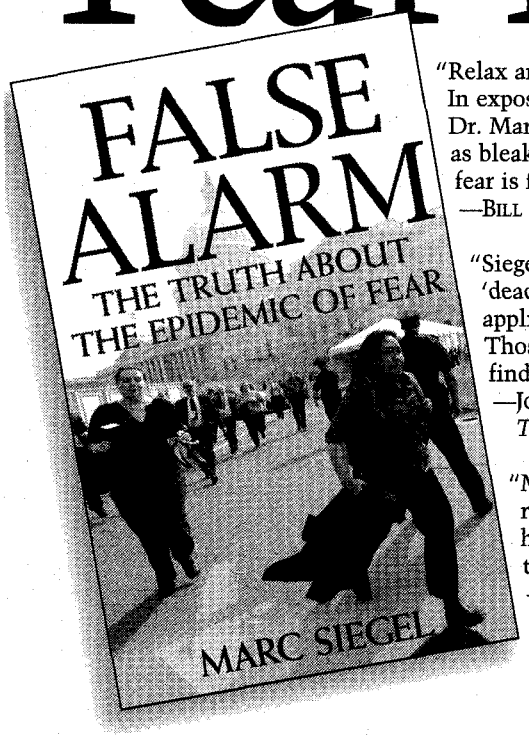

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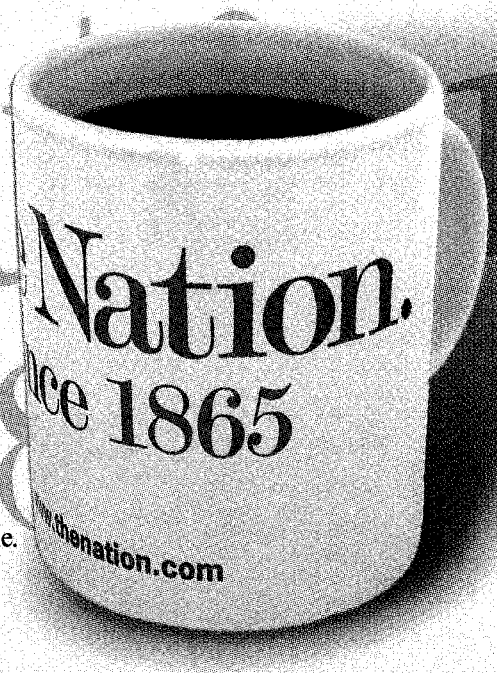

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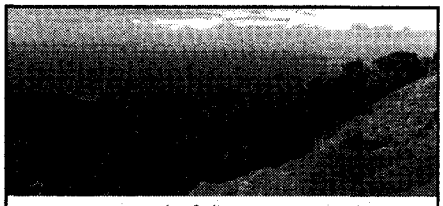
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own. "What passes for work in this town is men sitting under a tree waiting for the mangoes to ripen," he notes. His friend Burton, however, is a Kurtz-like character who joins the laborers "in their drumming and dancing," while at the same time "quite sure that the future for British possessions in Africa was the gradual decline and disappearance of the African population, and its replacement by European settlers." Turner is not the genocidal maniac that Burton is, but he nonetheless wonders whether there is any truth to the notion that "blacks have a natural instinct" to serve.

Pearce, by contrast, wanders into this world with a profound disgust for the entire colonial enterprise and instead devotes his time in Zanzibar and elsewhere to the study of the natives' history and language. Turner disagrees with Pearce's approach. His mission, as he understands it, is to govern the natives, not to try to understand them. Of his previous position in India, he says proudly, "I can stir up a bit of Hindustani myself, especially if I don't have to understand what the other fellow is saying. Well, it's impressive nevertheless." In Turner's world, language loses its purpose of communication and instead becomes a means of dominance and oppression.

The debate among these three representatives of colonialism (the brute Burton, the pragmatic Turner, the Orientalist Pearce) includes statements like this one, made by Turner:

> Here we are, 1899, what thought of the new century? Will we do better than our resolute predecessors? Will this place be cleared of its natives, and be turned into a kind of America, or will we see these chumps become civilised and hard-working subjects?

Although the language today might be more oblique, the sentiment that "these chumps" can and should be civilized is still very much a part of the imperial enterprise. In October 2001, for instance, Max Boot declared in *The Weekly Standard* that the "historic war aim" of the American invasion of Iraq was "to turn [it] into a beacon of hope for the oppressed peoples of the Middle East." (Never mind that half of Iraq's people will now be second-class citizens, thanks to the institution of an Islamic republic in this formerly secular country.) And just as Turner believes that the British Empire will not go the way of other empires, so, too, do the neocons in the current Administration believe that the American adventure in the Middle East is somehow different, because more "moral," than those before it.

The Zanzibaris, for their part, regard the foreigners who have come to rule them with a mix of suspicion, fear and awe. When Hassanali finds Pearce lying on the ground, he asks, in one of the book's many double-entendres: "Subhanallah, who are you? Are you human or spirit?" Pearce's arrival leads to a brief fight among the mosque-goers over who should have the privilege to take in the foreigner, the *mzungu*. Hassanali wins the honor, since he found the man and it is his Muslim duty to care for him until he recuperates. Almost immediately, though, Hassanali begins to worry that his home is not comfortable enough for the British man. He lets Pearce have the bedroom while he sleeps in the hallway, and "when the mzungu had regained his senses, they could ask him what he wished them to do." And indeed, neither Hassanali nor his friends bother to discuss the takeover of their lands in the same terms as Turner, Burton and Pearce. Rather, they appear to be concerned with surviving, with making do with what they have.

Rehana, confined to her home and to the homes of her friends, seems at first to be focused on affairs of the heart. Yet she turns out to be the most perceptive observer of the foreigners who suddenly appear in her home. Pearce doesn't strike her as a regular *mzungu*, but instead he is "more like complication and confusion." In Turner she sees "the snarling figure from the stories, the destroyer of nations." It is not Hassanali but Rehana who dares to stand up to Turner's abuse and to his accusations that they stole the sick man's belongings.

Gurnah's chapter on Rehana is his first attempt at writing from a female point of view. He has shown an interest in women's issues throughout his work (inheritance laws in *By the Sea*, arranged marriages in *Admiring Silence*, sexual bondage in *Paradise*), but taking on the female voice here allows him to paint an unusually complex portrait of this and other female characters. The women in *Desertion* range from the independent to the submissive, the sexually repressed to the unabashedly liberated, the educated to the ignorant, the pragmatic to the romantic. Gurnah seems to delight in turning stereotypes on their head. For instance, Farida, Amin and Rashid's sister, fails to get into high school and is eager to stay at home and work as

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a dressmaker, much to the dismay of her educated mother. Later, however, Farida writes and publishes collections of poetry that neither of her schooled brothers could have crafted.

The second part of *Desertion* focuses mostly on Amin, Rashid and Farida, who are portrayed against the tumultuous backdrop of a country heading toward independence. As a young boy, Rashid teaches himself Italian by reading books given to him by an uncle, a customs agent. He doesn't understand what the words mean, but he still refuses to address anyone in his family in any language but Italian. Eventually, everyone around him starts to believe that the boy does speak Italian, which earns him the respect of his elders. Aping the language of Europeans, even without understanding, confers power and respect. When Rashid goes to high school he excels in most subjects, but particularly in English. Like most products of a colonial education, Rashid begins to see himself through the lens of the outsiders. He grows up despising his culture and feeling, in a sense, that he belongs elsewhere. "The more complex [Rashid's] understanding became, the more it seemed that this world became his." Not surprisingly, Rashid leaves for Britain to pursue his education, only to find himself struggling to fit into a culture he thought he knew so well.

Amin doesn't share Rashid's academic ambitions. He is content to follow in his parents' footsteps and go to the local teacher-training college. But he dares to fall in love with Jamila, who turns out to be Rehana's granddaughter. The story of their courtship, constrained as it is by the conservative society in which they live and by the fact that it takes place during Ramadan, makes for one of the novel's most exquisitely written chapters.

> That night he dreamed about her again, and dreamed about the beast squatting on her. He was that beast, he thought when he woke up. He had been the beast all along, but had refused to recognize himself, an ugly obsessive creature trembling with feelings and desires that he would do better to suppress and deny.

The great irony of Amin's life is that his own parents defied their traditions by having a love marriage and finishing their studies before getting married. Out of loyalty to his parents, Amin abandons his lover, a decision that changes the course of his life, turning him into an exile in his own country, unable to connect with anyone or anything.

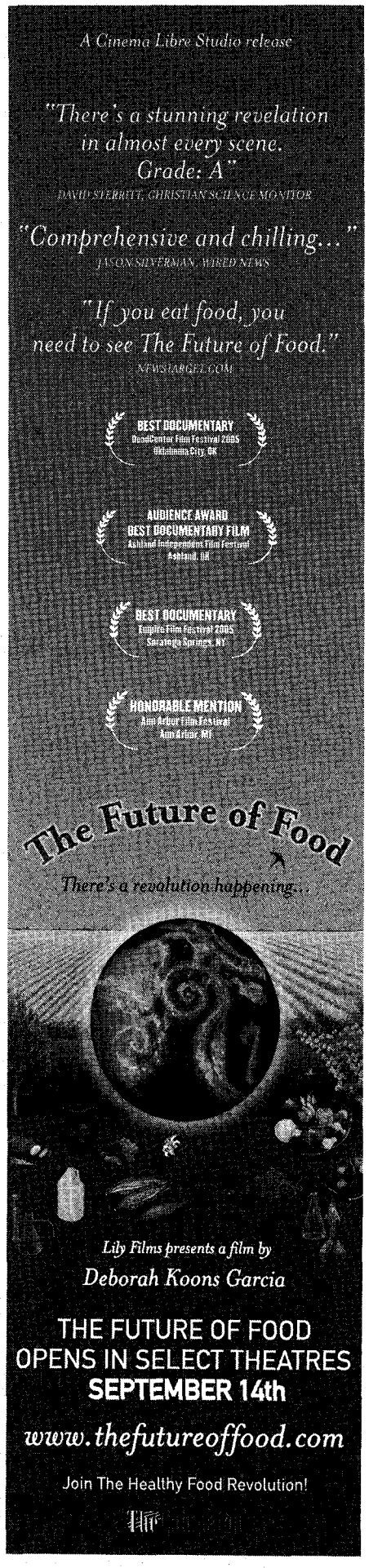
Desertion features several cross-cultural affairs, and they all seem doomed in one way or another. Hassanali's father is an Indian man who was rejected by his community for marrying an African woman. Pearce and Rehana set up house in Mombasa, but despite professions of love he doesn't marry her. When his term ends in the colonies, he leaves her and their child behind. And although Jamila lives in the relatively more enlightened era of the 1950s, she still cannot escape the stigma of her mixed blood.

Gurnah's interest in race is not new, of course. In his previous novel, the haunting *By the Sea*, an elderly asylum-seeker to the United Kingdom experiences racism from the moment he arrives at the airport, where an immigration officer relieves him of a precious box of incense, the only reminder of the life he had to leave behind. During his detention he also notices the casual hatred that a group of Algerians have for a fellow refugee, an Angolan. "In their eyes he was a black man, a lesser son of Adam than them, capable only of a subservient rage and an unreflecting resilience." But in *Desertion* Gurnah appears to go a step further, suggesting that the notion of race is a construct of power, an artificial way of defining—and dividing—humanity. Living in England, Rashid succumbs to the logic of race, even as he recognizes its illogic:

> Soon I began to say black people and white people, like everyone else, uttering the lie with increasing ease, conceding the sameness of our difference, deferring to a deadening vision of a racialised world. For by agreeing to be black and white, we also agree to limit the complexity of possibility, we agree to mendacities that for centuries served and will continue to serve crude hungers for power and pathological self-affirmations.

It might be objected that Rashid's thoughts recall the language of a professor of postcolonial studies like Gurnah, and in such moments Gurnah's characters risk becoming the mouthpiece of their creator. Fortunately, these didactic lapses are rare, in what is for the most part a lyrical, intensely felt work of the imagination.

The desertion of the title should, by now, be fairly straightforward. White men desert their native lovers, Muslim men desert liberated partners, and young, educated men desert Zanzibar for the comforts of Britain. But there is another kind of desertion that haunts the novel: the British colonial experience. Indeed, Gurnah



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seems to suggest that Britain "deserted" its colonies, like the islands of Zanzibar, before the time was right. In a postcolonial novel this might seem like a startling assertion, but it is not new to Gurnah. One of the main characters in *By the Sea* remarks that he married in 1963, "a year before the British departed in a huff and left us to the chaos and violence that attended the end of their empire." Gurnah appears to fault the British for not living up to their responsibilities, for disrupting a social order without being asked and then leaving the resulting problems for others to solve. One could even argue that the disjointed narrative in *Desertion* is deliberate, that it is Gurnah's way of reflecting a world in which relationships between people, between countries, are interrupted before they have run their course. Seen in this light, the novel has a staying power that belies its quietness. ■

FILMS

A Continent for the Taking

STUART KLAWANS

THE CONSTANT GARDENER • THE BROTHERS GRIMM • KEANE

The Constant Gardener is so substantial, engaged, emotionally nuanced and lovingly crafted that I feel in danger of criticizing it to death. Unfair comparisons with other movies spring to mind, arguments against the narrative conventions, objections to the style, none of which I would have raised against a lesser film. I blame the screenwriter, Jeffrey Caine, and the director, Fernando Meirelles (*City of God*), and even John le Carré, who wrote the novel that inspired the picture. So effectively have they addressed their subject—the everyday, business-as-usual destruction of Africa's people—that I struggle to forgive them for having made only a movie.

At the heart of this political story, and so of the critical difficulties, lies a human problem: Can meek, decent British diplomat Justin Quayle dare to believe that his wife, Tessa, loves him? Or, to restate the problem in more immediate terms, can movie star Ralph Fiennes believe that movie star Rachel Weisz loves him? The second question, by answering itself, helps to decide the first, for good and bad alike.

On the good side, Weisz has what is easily her best screen role to date, in which she gets to overwhelm her every scene with flooding speech and bursting flesh. "You're quite scary," Fiennes says to her at their first encounter, in a tone pitched precisely between flirtation and candor. To her raging river, he plays the obliging bank; and for that, Weisz's Tessa cherishes him. She will even try to protect Justin by diverting the torrent from him, sometimes.

But does this impassioned activist have any passion for him? On the personal level, *The Constant Gardener* is largely the story of Justin's doubts. Has Tessa married him only as her way of moving to his new posting, so she can pursue justice in Kenya? Is she as close to beautiful Arnold (Hubert Koundé), a doctor engaged in an AIDS program, as everyone in Nairobi thinks? Is she as open to Sandy (Danny Huston), Justin's boss at the British mission, as Sandy seems to believe? The filmmakers, collectively, are so clever that they not only raise these questions but toy with them for a long stretch, going so far as to tease you at one point with an abrupt, outrageous shot of a maternal Tessa attended by all three men.

Had someone less famous than Fiennes played Justin, maybe the doubt could have been prolonged even further. (And the film might not have been commercially viable, so you would never have known.) In the event, though, you can guess that Tessa must feel something for a man whose screen lovers have ranged from Juliette Binoche to Jennifer Lopez. Fiennes diminishes the suspense by his mere presence; but paradoxically, this blow to the intimate drama serves to strengthen the political story of *The Constant Gardener*.

When you reach the hinge of the movie, when Justin shifts from doubting Tessa to carrying on her work as a muckraker, you need to believe there's hidden steel in this man, who is so habitually polite that he can respond to a death threat with a murmured "You've been very kind." Fiennes has developed a specialty of giving just this im-

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pression; in films from *The English Patient* through *Spider*, he has played characters who are wavering, damaged or even abject but somehow strong enough to persist. In *The Constant Gardener*, Fiennes's star personality makes credible the entire second half of the film—by which I mean its plot, of course. On the level of portraying North-South relations, the film is simply and horribly unchallengeable.

Dozens of people die in *The Constant Gardener*—a few abruptly, most through a slow and quiet violence—and their killers, whom Tessa wants to unmask, are the very people who claim to be helping Africa. They are the men (always men) whose companies offer desperately needed services or jobs, with a catch; they are the government officials, both British and local, who make sure these companies do good business. Everybody with the right connections profits, while in the shantytowns and villages the bodies pile up, human life there having been reckoned a commercial write-off. You don't need a thriller plot to know about this—in the real world the facts lie about in plain sight—but *The Constant Gardener* gives you an intrigue anyway, and a good one, which Meirelles plays for all it's worth.

His first contribution as director is to cram the picture with children. They're everywhere, showing you with their ebullience that life in Africa may be poor but must not be thought cheap. Is this a self-evident point? Meirelles, to his credit, does not shy away from the obvious. He is willing to swing from a white-patronized golf course to a black shantytown in a single, brutal pan; or to plunge his camera through a hectic, crowded kitchen, out the service door and into the placidity of a cocktail reception; or to cut between a grieving Fiennes and the images he has in memory of a rumpled and grinning Weisz, sprawled happily against an expanse of white sheet. Meirelles can hurl an image at your head as if daring you to catch it, or get out of the way; and, when he needs to, he can also let ambiguity seep slowly into a scene.

On the bad side, though, Meirelles doesn't know when to stop. He cuts relentlessly and fusses with colors and pours on music until you think you're watching *The Constant Soundtrack*. The subject hardly calls for such expressionism—but Meirelles apparently felt he had to give the film a look, to go with its movie stars and whodunit plot.

Meanwhile, an African cinema exists. Its productions are few in number, but they can be extraordinarily good—beautifully clear and poised in style where *The Constant Gardener* is frenetic; centered on African characters where *The Constant Gardener* focuses on Europeans; complex in tone (by turns funny, angry, argumentative and hopeful) where *The Constant Gardener* is consistently despairing. By saying this, I don't mean to deny the right of British writers and producers, and their Brazilian director, to make a story set in Africa. So much the better, if moviemakers want to look at what's happening in the world. But when Europeans such as Hubert Sauper are knocking around the continent, making devastating films like *Darwin's Nightmare* [reviewed August 15/22], some of the luster fades from this chic and prestigious picture.

So what should you do about *The Constant Gardener*? See it, of course. The production will keep you entertained, and the subject matter (have I mentioned the pharmaceuticals industry?) will surely give you much to discuss later, over dinner. It's a package deal. I just think you might want to supplement it by seeking out a few African films and then signing up for action with the best muckrakers in your neighborhood.

I don't know why Terry Gilliam has a grudge against Napoleon—he's been beating up on the pompous little murderer ever since *Time Bandits*—but for his new picture he's finally marshaled all his forces against the Emperor. In *The Brothers Grimm*, Gilliam comes at him with the combined power of the world's bedtime stories.

The year: 1811. The place: Occupied Thuringia. Will and Jake Grimm, itinerant con artists, are engaged in scaring the wits out of a backward people with fake hauntings and enchantments, all of them copied from local folklore. Jake, who is the younger and weaker of the brothers, gathers the stories, while swaggering Will collects the fee for dispersing the imaginary threats. (Will is also in charge of bedding each town's prettiest girls and pushing Jake around.) You might say that the Grimms, as agents of a rapacious rationalism, are much like the despised French—except that Jake enjoys the stories for their own sake, and both of the brothers are soon put under arrest by the local Napoleonic general, who sentences them to death for their larceny.

The Grimms have one chance to save themselves. They must go to work for the general and rid him of another set of scam mysteries, which someone is perpetrating around the village of Marbaden.

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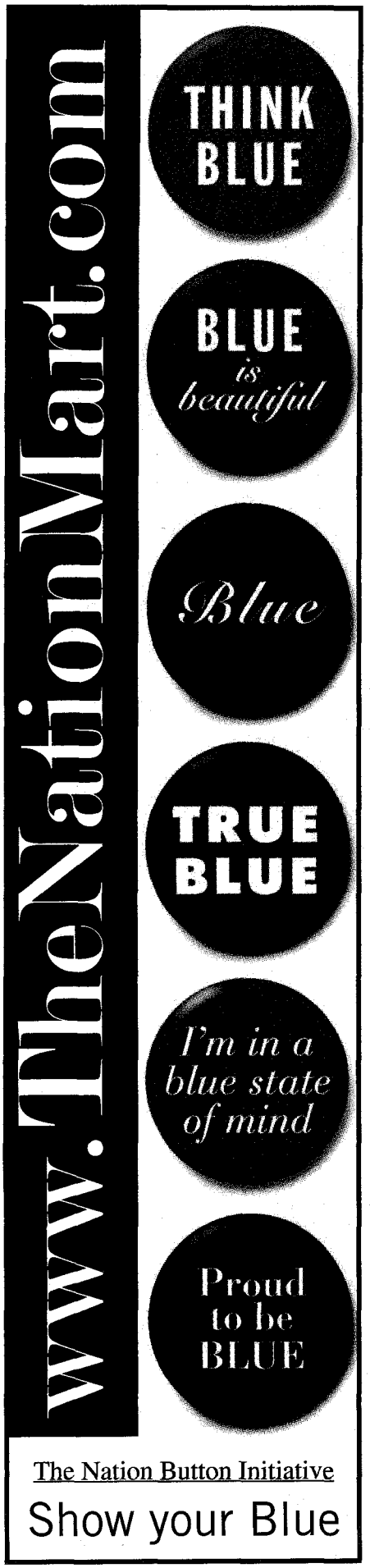

Hood and Rapunzel—I can now dispense with plot and talk about the things that really matter to Gilliam: crows, bugs, toads, animal skins, crypts, mirrors, winches, cogwheels and walking trees.

He throws in a lot of them. You can always count on Gilliam to stuff the frame, just as you can expect him to encourage all of the supporting actors and some of the leads to prance, careen, carom, toss their limbs about, pop their eyes, stick out their chins and talk fast in funny accents. The prizewinner in the latter competition is Peter Stormare, who is close to unintelligible two-thirds of the time as the Italian torture-master Cavaldi; but Matt Damon (Will), Heath Ledger (Jake) and Gilliam standby Jonathan Pryce (General Delatombe) play along, too, not just willingly but with enthusiasm. What, no women? Well, almost none (again, as you'd expect). International Beauty Monica Bellucci™ fills out the part of the Mirror Queen, and Lena Headey appears as the fierce pagan huntress Angelika—a promising role, until she's demoted to love interest and girl-in-peril. Yes, back to the plot. The script for *The Brothers Grimm* is not everything you'd want it to be; but neither is it as bad as you'd fear, with the screenplay credited to Ehren Kruger (*The Ring*, *The Ring Two*, *Scream 3*, *Reindeer Games*). The fun obsessions and the faults alike may be assigned to Gilliam.

If you think *Brazil* is a masterpiece (I don't), you may be disappointed in *The Brothers Grimm*. But if, like me, you've come to miss Gilliam during his long hiatus—all those years without his crowded, cynical, sentimental, overbearing and inimitably memorable visions—then there's only one possible response to *The Brothers Grimm*. Welcome back, Terry.

It may seem strange to devote only a few words to a film as affecting and pure as Lodge Kerrigan's new feature, *Keane*; but sometimes a picture demands that the critic get in and out fast. For this story of a solitary and unstable man searching hopelessly for his abducted 7-year-old daughter, Kerrigan shot in the real-life bustle of New York City's Port Authority Bus Terminal, pushed his lead actor into actual traffic and kept a hand-held camera focused continually on the amazing, seemingly selfless Damian Lewis. Let me be similarly direct, and as succinct as Kerrigan's opening shot, which shows the steel struts of the Port Authority as a frieze of crosses waiting for their Jesus. Lewis suffers; Lewis is redeemed; and the process is precisely as hard as it needs to be. ■

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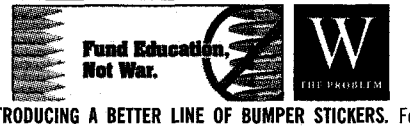

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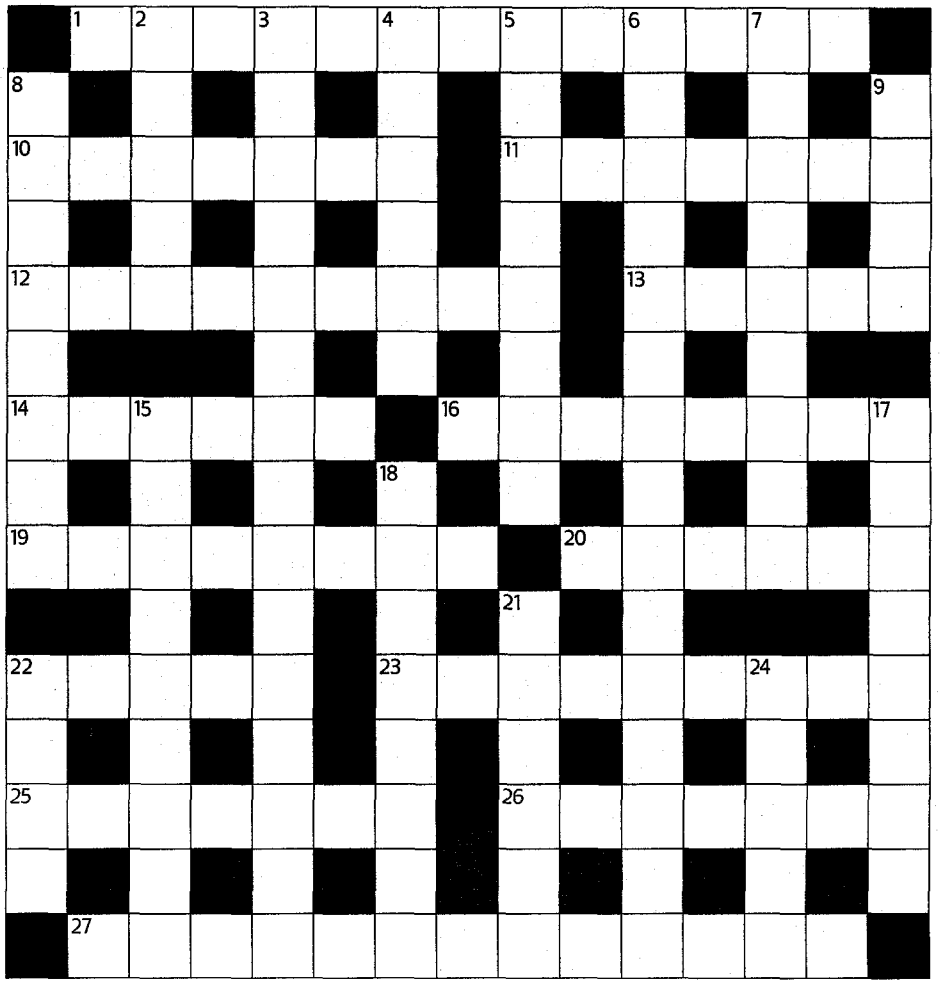

ACROSS

1 In an unusual manner, but not for one going on with a companion. (13)

10 Are in the home as often the most close companion to dearest. (7)

11 Notice it comes back as a knock-out, showing the effects of the sun on one from Fargo, for example. (7)

12 A bad actor, having acres plowed up in the money-making place... (9)

13 ...and a bad shot made by one of the Musketeers. (5)

14 The point of a stroke, perhaps, is that you get bad writing with it. (6)

16 Hitchings, so-called. (8)

19 Useless things where 11 might hail from might still keep the spark alive. (8)

20 What's the point, when being made better about it—yet given a bad name? (6)

22 At coming back carrying something often associated with a hard row, you see a pretty lake. (5)

23 Not a hard-working girl, but one possibly taking a turn at table service. (4,5)

25 Is it judicious to find an excessively proper type with part of the Bible? (7)

26 The fruit of bad atmosphere with bad doings? (7)

27 Opera guild member? (13)

DOWN

2 They might be responsible for someone seeing right through you! (1-4)

3 Their work may be supercilious, but they have quite a pull! (7,8)

4 The painter of a bird and a "Scottish John." (6)

5 What might be 50-50 around it that is peculiar stuff? (8)

6 It might deserve a clumsy answer. (7,8)

7 and **24** Allowing those slippery problems to take care of themselves? (3,6,5)

8 As Queen Victoria claimed to be with the international body having the morning showing some wear. (8)

9 The objectives improperly send the consequences. (4)

15 Not the one that the poet wanted to live in as a side issue—usually outside the limits. (9)

17 Africans who bring us up and get it confused by 120 degrees. (8)

18 Our sort have an unfinished letter about a wheel of fortune. (8)

21 Down Under, as they say, on Noah's production leads to a point in the mountains? (6)

22 Upchuck? Just info—or money! (4)

24 See 7

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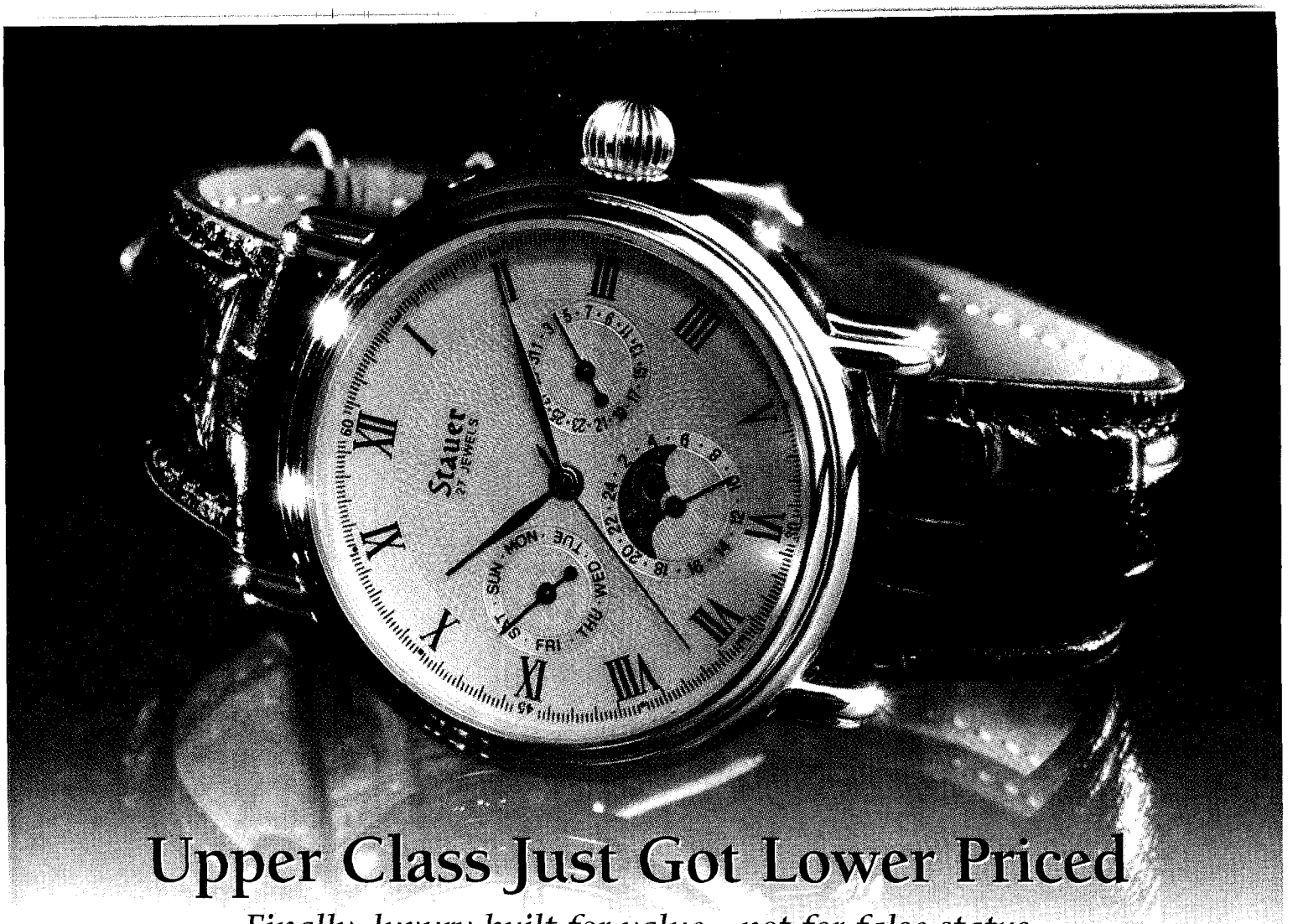

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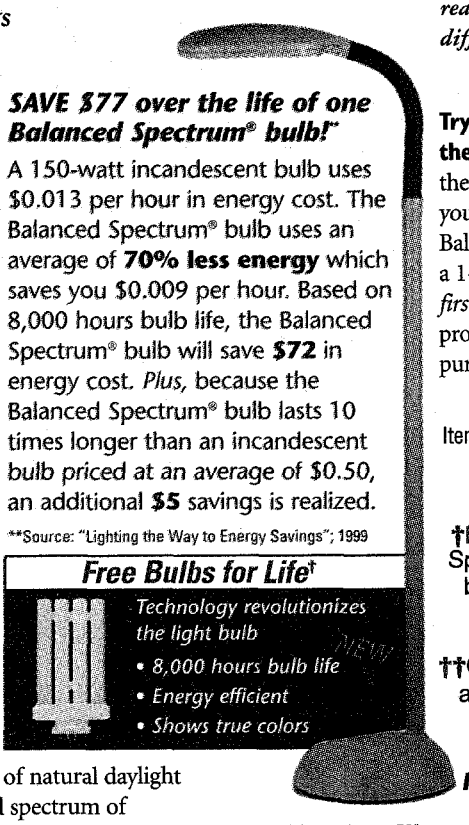

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